

Katzen Jammer

Alibi Arnie Tugs at Your Heartstrings with Lots of Excuses

One pleasure of present day fandom is letters from Robert Lichtman. I've known Robert since he was a Bob. When I was a neofan the first time, his "fandbook" filled in some major knowledge gaps. I collected a set of *Frap* which influenced my own publishing more than some better known titles. I always regretted that he steadily cut his activity during the same years I produced the best of my stuff.

When I returned to fandom, I found that Robert had degafiated years before me. It didn't take long to figure out that he'd become just about the top active U.S. fannish fan - *Trapdoor* publisher, FAPA officer, and TAFF winner. I took it as a good omen about contemporary fandom.

Robert has helped me a lot during my second neohood with everything from addresses to fanhistory lessons. *Trapdoor* - and Lenny Bailes' *Whistlestar* - inspired *Folly*. So when a letter from Glen Ellen's Box 30 arrived

in the first mail delivery of 1991, I eagerly ripped it out of the envelope.

No doubt mindful of his awesome responsibilities as FAPA secretary-treasurer, Robert came right to the point in his opening paragraph: He invited me to join the Fantasy Amateur Press Association.

"Maybe 'third time lucky,'" I reflected ruefully. My two

previous memberships each lasted a year, versus eight years on the waitlist. Joyce and I did one *Tandem*, a bulky FAPA-gzine with a multi-page Ross Chamberlain cartoon cover, but my activity record incited no comparisons to Warner.

This time, I spent only six months on the waitlist. Now I was a FAPA member again, a fan with a clean slate and a chance for redemption. My joy was boundless.

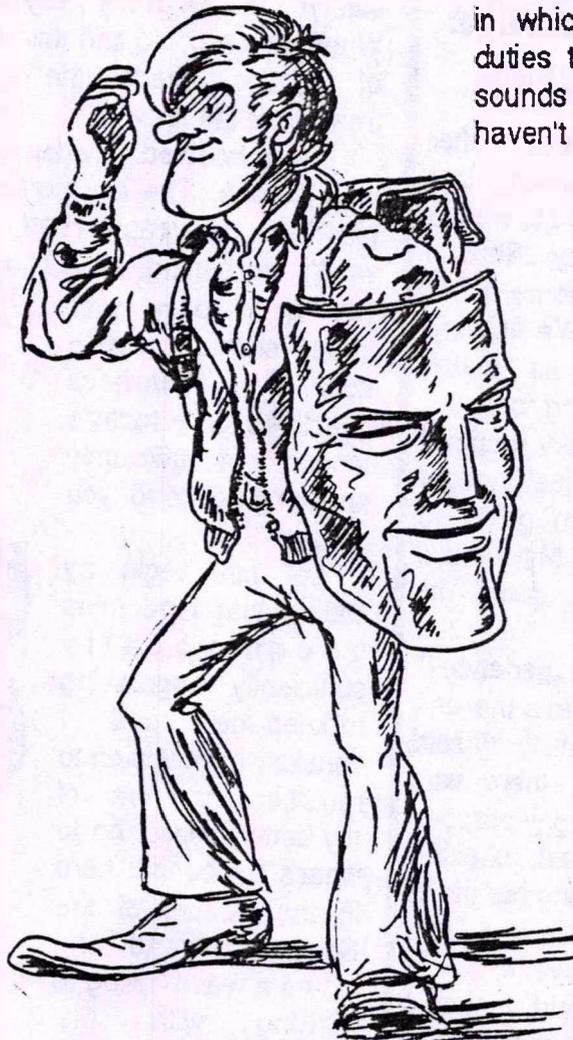
Until I read the next sentence, in which Robert explained my duties to the organization. He sounds a disturbing note. "If you haven't regafiated, that shouldn't

prove too onerous."

Regafiated? After one quiet month, my friend Robert Lichtman practically had me packed off to the Glades! Perhaps he'd already written a penetrating, yet genial, squib for *Trapdoor* about my meteoric rise and fall in Fandom 1990.

All right, it was true. I hadn't done much fanac between Thanksgiving and New Years. I'd match my litany of alibis against any other layabout's lame excuses.

In the old days, I had sometimes gone as long as two or three



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had rushed to write my epitaff. Obviously, today's fandom has New Rules.

Or was it just me? Did even Robert Lichtman, he who was once known as "Blob", not quite trust this suddenly revived fan? Were my newfound friends watching me with narrowed eyes for signs of weakness?

I hung my head, ashamed of my paranoia. It was unworthy in light of the warmth I've felt from

just about every fan contact.

The second paragraph of Robert's letter began promisingly with praise for Katzian fanzines old and new. Just as the uneasy feeling began to recede, I read this jolter: "...I'm wondering if you're going to continue [*Fally*]. It's traditional, after all, in magazine-land to do three issues and then quit if the response isn't adequate. Is that what's happened to *Fally*?"

Not only regafiated, but regafiated in a fit of wounded vanity! I looked at my *Fally* locs. What person could find this feast of egoboo "inadequate"? I frowned at the answer.

I was troubled. Evidently, so was Robert. The key portion of his final paragraph read, "So what's happening, Arnie? Have you been busy with trade shows, heavy-duty business deadlines, or is today's fandom not sufficiently engaging to keep you around?"

Let me begin by stating that fandom is unequivocally sufficiently engrossing to keep me around. I consider my decision to resume fanac one of my better ideas. As to what's happening here in the Sodom of the Southwest, read on..

As a weird epilogo to "Driving with Ms. Rachael", Becky Shayne was involved in an auto accident with Rachael Bertrand Herself at the wheel.

I've heard a lot about un-headed warnings to go slow and unfastened seatbelts, but there's no dispute about the actual crash. A careless Cadillac hit Rachael's car a glancing blow that pinwheeled it into the on-coming traffic, where it collided head-on with a tractor-trailer. Just as Becky was silently congratulating herself over surviving the collision, a truck slammed into the car from the other direction.

The first time I saw Becky after the accident, she was wearing a neck brace, a back brace, and a knee brace - and had received wounds necessitating over 40 stitches in those gorgeous legs. (At the risk of seeming sexist, I will say that my assistant has notable legs, even in leggy Las Vegas.)

Deja Vu Meets Dejah Tharis

It was the day after Thanksgiving. Knowing that Joyce and I intended to work a few hours, Becky Shayne came over to get some of her stuff done, too. We finished our tasks and, as usual, gathered in the living room.

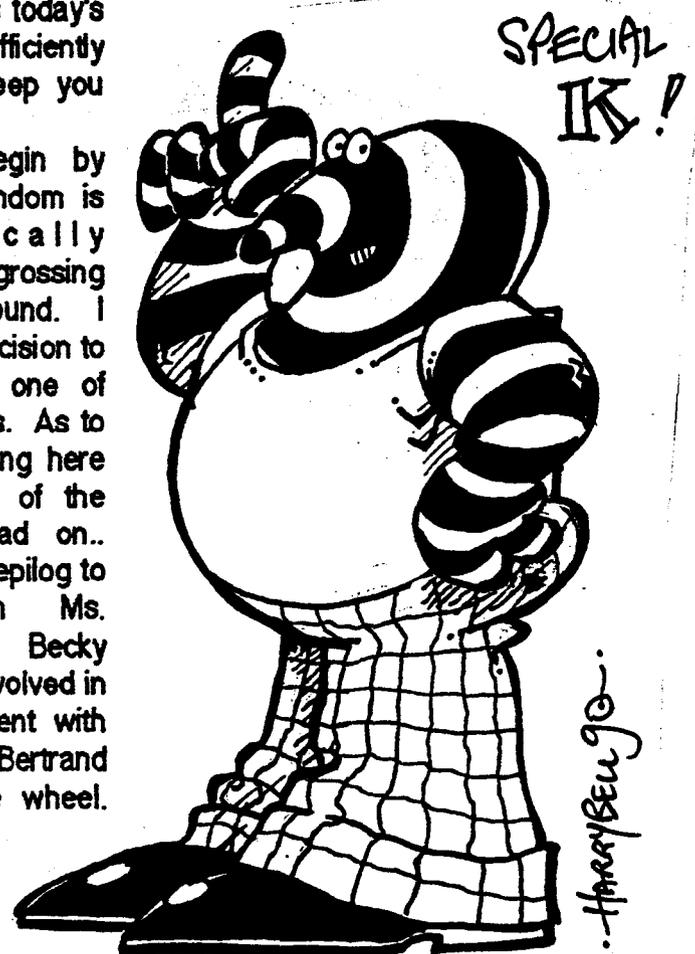
That's when Becky dropped her bombshell. "I just thought of a Deja Vu I'm going to have," she said. My senses reeled as I pondered its possible meaning.

"A deja vu experience?" Joyce asked. That's the one I'd guessed, too. If Becky said "read the Book", there was going to be one leggy oorpse.

"No," Becky said, shaking her curls and saving her life in one gesture. "This is a Deja Vu I'm going to have."

"I see that," I said, though I didn't. "What kind of deja vu?"

"Some time in the future, the three of us are going to go to the French Riviera and attend one of those week-long masquerade parties," she explained. "And when I get there, I'm going to have a deja vu experience."



Becky came back to work within days of the mishap, but it took her considerably longer to get back to full power. It's good to have her back, but there were a couple of weeks when Becky couldn't carry her usual load.

Normally, Bill and Joyce would pick up the slack, but this was a sickly holiday season for *Fally's* two most illustrious columnists.

Nothing major, but debilitating. My work day lengthened, and fanac sat undone. Preparations for the winter Consumer Electronics Show, held January 9-13, increased everyone's workload, and the show itself totally monopolized life for about 10 days.

Obscuring all this for me, in more ways than one, is a cataract in my right eye, the only one with vision. The doctor scheduled the operation for February 26.

Apparently, my vision has slowly deteriorated for some time. This partially

explains my recent losing skirmishes with typos. It also suggests why peeing is taking on the aspect of long-range artillery practice.

Joyce occasionally boasts that I'm the perfect consort for an Aging Beauty. She says my sight weakens just enough each year to balance the onset of additional lines. I think I may've carried

things too far, even for her vanity.

I didn't detect the erosion, because my sight wasn't much in the first place. When I began noticing problems in late October, I went to an eye doctor. He immediately diagnosed the cataract and sent me to a cataract surgeon.

Dr. Westfield, the cataract surgeon, sent me to a retina specialist to determine whether my woeful eye can stand up to even such a minor operation.

The retina expert, though concerned, cleared me for cataract surgery. As far as I can tell, the odds of regaining the sight I have lost are pretty good, though the procedure is much riskier for me due to the generally shaky condition of the eye.

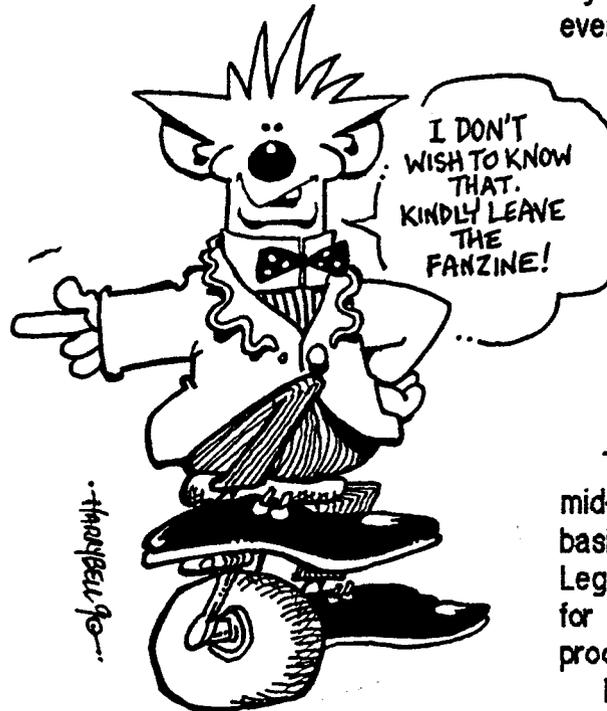
The doctor notified me in a mid-November call that, on the basis of current vision, I am Legally Blind. *There's* a squelch for the next comment that I proofread like a blindman.

Evidently, Legal Blindness covers a range of vision. I can get around the house, do chores, and such. I can work at the Mac, despite the perpetual danger of nose as well as eye tracks.

The operation takes eight minutes, but it'll be eight weeks before my eye fully adjusts to the lens implant, and I can be fitted with glasses. I have no idea how soon after surgery my vision will clear enough to let me go back to work or fanac.

I hope people won't impute my silence to Low Motives. I'm enjoying my second stint in fandom tremendously, and I'd hate to have folks think otherwise.

You aren't going to get rid of me that easily. □



Bent for 'Lecture

Arnie Picks a TAFF Candidate... Maybe

The ballot for the 1991 Trans Atlantic Fan Fund (TAFF) to bring a deserving European to the World Science Fiction Convention in Chicago later this year arrived from Robert Lichtman on January 14th. After five solid days of total absorption — and absorption — in the electronic gaming world, it was blessed relief to find this reminder of fandom's sunniest side atop this pile of mail.

This is the first TAFF election since my return, so I felt a rush of

nostalgia as I unfolded the flyer and beheld the names of the candidates. Three names jumped from the page of impeccable Lichtman typography: Abigail Frost, Bruno Ogorolec, and Pam Wells.

Voting in TAFF wasn't going to be as easy as I had hoped. Standing in the way of the swift discharge of my fannish duty was my ignorance of current fandom.

To shorten a long story, I don't

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Bent for L'ection

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know any of them. The closest I could come was Jennifer Wells, Jack Frost, and Bruno Sammartino. Intriguing possibilities, perhaps, but not helpful in picking a candidate.

I decided to follow the sterling example of the American Judicial System and embrace my ignorance. Trials are sometimes moved to distant cities to find a jury which has absolutely no knowledge of the case.

That was a qualification I could meet with ease, so I decided to study the facts and come to an intelligent decision.

I considered the names. The image of a video game called *TAFFer* sprang to life. I could see Abigail, Bruno, and Pam moving through the maze of Fandom, gobbling up

egoboo. When the Lichtman icon appeared, a candidate ran over him for 1,000 bonus points.

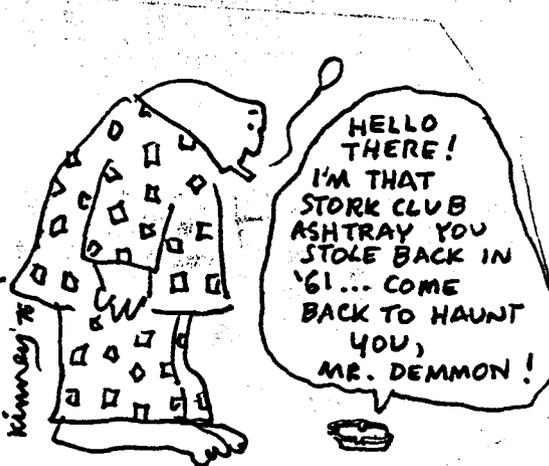
Too much CES, I guess. I pulled the mental plug on *TAFFer*. Again, I considered the names. Since I didn't know a single thing about any of them, it was comparatively easy for my renegade imagination to conjure images of each of them.

Abigail Frost would be a Vicar's Daughter, a spinster somewhat up in years but still handsome in a lean way. I saw her sitting by the fire in a comfy sitting room, knitting a blanket for her sister's second grandchild. TAFF would be in safe, almost maternal hands.

Bruno Ogorolec next took his place on the imaginary platform. This handsome scion of a family which had not yet accepted the

loss of an Eastern European throne adjusted his monocle, twirled his dark moustache and winked at a striking woman in the frontrow. A bit of a rake, perhaps, but a stalwart chap, I was sure.

Jennifer Wells did something moderately incredible with tassels, but then I remembered that it was *Pam* Wells. As the blonde porno star undulated into a corner of my mind to await later retrieval, Pam Wells bounded through my consciousness, her



lovable sheepdog Lord Dunsany romping along by her side. The big shaggy animal jumped and capered around the sweet-faced girl, whose merry eyes danced as she smiled and courtseyed in all directions. I was sure she'd make a charming guest in America.

Having squandered my mental resources, I resorted to the Wisdom of the Ancients. I examined several forms of illumination, but found nothing applicable to my purpose until I stumbled on this adage in an old high school autograph book:

"There are gold ships,
there are silver ships,
but there's no ship
like friend-ship."

The message was clear: gilt by association. I would judge the candidates by the excellence of their nominators. Unless I didn't

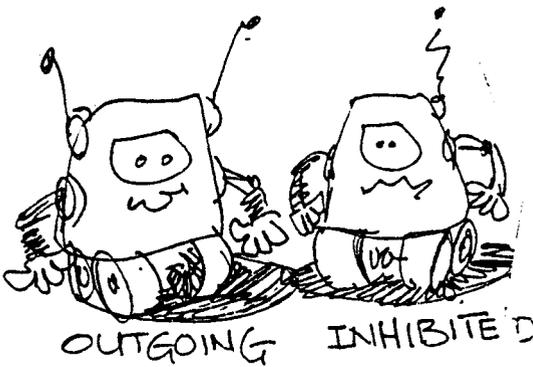
know their nominators, either. Fortunately for my self-confidence — and the avoidance of repetition — most of the king- (or queen) makers were as familiar as a Vegas casino girl.

The first two names on Abigail Frost's list scored heavily with me. I had known John D. Berry since we were both teenagers and had helped lure him from Monster Fandom to ours. We had co-edited (*Void #29*), and he had appeared on the *Quip* covers. And Gary Farber! Now *there's* a thoroughly delightful, upbeat guy. He could never support a less-than-exemplary fan. A couple of the British supporters were not too familiar to me, I admit, but even a gaffate like me had heard of Dave Langford. He'd never back less than the best.

So I was definitely leaning toward Abigail when I came to Bruno's list of nominators. I knew Jenny Glover only by (good) reputation, but the other four stand high on the list of favorite fans. Dick Lynch and Mark Manning are fans I've met since degafiation, but I've quickly grown to enjoy their fanac tremendously. Skel and I have had little or no fannish contact, though we've swapped a zine now and again. I've felt a slight kinship with him for years, because he is, like me, the male half of a fanzining couple. And what can I say about Walter A. Willis? Great fan, outstanding person, helpful friend. If Willis liked Bruno, then I liked Bruno, too. At least as well as I liked Abigail.

So it was a two-way dead heat when I turned to the list for Pam Wells. What a great collection of fanzine fans! Viné Clarke had recently send me some Martin Tudor fanzines, so I was

impressed to find him in the Wells camp. Jeanne Gomoll and Lucy Huntzinger, two of the U.S. nominators, are among today's most respect fans, and I've been quite impressed by Harry Bond's contributions to recent FAPA mailings. But the



name that stood out like a beacon was Chuch Harris. I admit it: I am a Chuch Harris fan. His *Through Darkest Ireland* has been a favorite of mine since the 1960s, and his account of his trip to MiniCon captivated me totally. His seal of approval made Pam Wells a top choice. Besides, Chuch, a bigger hound even than me, wouldn't recommend a woman an inch short of perfection.

I looked at the ballot. I had a three way tie, and no other

candidates. "Hold Over Funds" was out of the question. With three such fine candidates, I was damned if I was going to spend my money without getting at least one of them to the Chicon. I know value when I see it. So I marked a bold "1" next to each of the three names and sent the ballots (with a contribution) to the administrator.

The rest of you will probably want to pick a TAFF delegate using your own method, but I hope you'll all follow my example

and send your choice and a check to either Robert Lichtman or Christina Lake.

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Let'er Ride, the letter column, will continue to ride until next issue. Apologies to the legion of Loccers whose sterling words must wait an additional month for their day in the sun.

Joyce Worley, Becky Shayne, and other contributors will return next time, too.

Proofreading by Joyce

Artwork

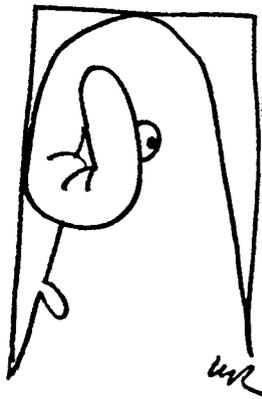
Harry Bell: 2,3,9
Grant Canfield 9
Ross Chamberlain: 1, 8
Ken Fletcher 11
David Haugh: 5
Jay Kinney: 4
Bill Rotsler: 8, 10

INNER TUBE

A Visit to the World Between the Shows

If you watch much television, commercials are hard to avoid. Note that I didn't say that they are "unpostponable" or even "irreducible". A VCR can fast-forwards through all the commercials. This limits the duration of the

agony, but they impinge on our consciousness as they fly past our eyes at super speed. There are automatic editing devices that remove commercials, but most of us end up seeing a lot of advertising.



I don't know about you, but I often fixate on a commercial. Sometimes, it's because it is brilliantly executed, like the recent "Mario" ad in which the chanting kids transform into a big Mario face. A current series of ads familiar to readers in the Southwest, is for the Carl's Junior restaurant chain's new roast beef sandwich

A single resonant line can capture me for a month. Who can forget Clara Peller demanding, "Where's the Beef?". The most recent of this type appears in the otherwise ordinary ad for an entirely worthy medical alert medallion that helps senior

citizens summon emergency help. At one point in the dramatization, an incredibly aggrieved voice whines, "I've fallen, and I can't get up." I always respond to her invincibly kvetchy tone with thought more

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G A F I A T I O N

BY JOE WALCOTT

The Great Conspiracy of Super Fandom -- Revealed!!

Chapter One: Fandom's Outcast

What a difference, then... and now. If you'd come up to me at a Planeteers meeting and started babbling about a fandomwide conspiracy, I'd have laughed in your face. I would have called you a stupid dork. Then I might've gotten a little nasty.

I wouldn't have hit you, but if you didn't shut up or go away, I'd have orally reviewed your last fanzine. And I am known as a demanding critic. That was then. Before my accidental discovery. Before I learned The Truth.

Now, I go up to people at the Planeteers. I try to explain about the conspiracy. Arnie Katz laughed in my face last night. I distinctly heard Bill Kunkel mutter something about stupid dorks. And *Wowser #6* was not as bad as Joyce Katz said, even if the stencil for page 19 leaked like that. I've got a damn Macintosh SE on order, so it isn't like I'm ignoring the problem.

It is hard to believe that one fanzine article, in *Lan's Lantern* at that, could have made me an outcast in fandom. Yet that's exactly what happened when my "Super Fans Among Us" hit fannish mailboxes.

And what, after all, did I really do? Did I attack anyone? No. Did I demean women, insult any social or ethnic group, or cast aspersions on another fan's sexual prowess? No, no, and definitely not. I didn't seduce anyone's daughter or vomit during a Hugo acceptance speech. To be technically accurate, I have done all of these things in the past, but not in this particular article.

I simply proposed a theory -- a theory, mind you, not a Law of Nature -- that there is another, secret fandom composed of mega-fans beyond the ken of fandom as we know it. That's all I did. Just gave my theory along with the supporting information. It didn't even fill a full page in *Lan's Lantern*, but it exploded in the middle of my fannish life like a bomb.

In case you are the only fan who didn't

receive that issue three months ago, George Laskowski won't mind if I print a few highlights from that pivotal piece.

"They are among us. They are not aliens from outer space or dero from the caves -- unless you count Steve Pickering -- or non-fan friends. They are the great fans, the legends and the elder gods of fandom's glorious past..."

* * *

"Until three weeks ago, I was totally in the dark. I had heard jokes and even a wild rumor, but I did not give them credence. Like you, I was a skeptic and a cynic. Then I heard the voices.

"I was at the Rockon in Boulder City. My wife Gloria had headed up to the room to "slip into something bizarre" as she put it. Conventions are also a vacation from Robbie and Justin for us, and we like to make the most of them.

I was hunting a soda machine that hadn't run out of Diet Coke, and I wasn't having a lot of luck. I'd already tried three floors and found one broken machine and two that had only Neddicks Orange. Apparently, orange is not a favorite of Rockon attendees.

The elevators weren't any better than they usually are during a con, and I was getting tired of waiting for them and then jamming in tightly with a lot of belching drunks, so I decided to use the stairs for my next -- and avowedly last -- attempt to find Gloria's favorite brand of soft drink.

* * *

"If I had simply returned down the stairs I'd just ascended to reach the 14th floor, I would never have heard the voices. The soda machine was all the way at the end of a long corridor. I emptied it of the last four cans of Diet Coke and then noticed the stairway door to the left of the bulky machine. I pushed the solid metal door. It eased open on well-oiled hinges.

"The stairway wasn't well-lit, but it wasn't dangerous. I inched forward slowly, using my free hand to seize an iron grip on the railing.

"I eased down the bare wooden steps to the landing between the floors. This was obviously part of the original hotel building, and the piles of debris

suggested it wasn't used much these days. The staff probably found it more convenient to take one of the newer, more centrally located stairways.

That was when I heard the voices. Someone had removed the light bulb on the landing, so I was invisibly cloaked in shadow.

* * *

"The first words of the conversation froze me to the spot and made my breath catch in my throat. The dialogue went like this:

"So they think you're dead?"

"Yes. It's really touching the way they miss me."

"You can't let sentimentality bother you at this point. It would ruin everything if they found out about Elder Fandom...."

* * *

"I tried to edge closer, but I heard an ominous creak when my foot hit the second stair down from the landing. I crouched and held my breath. The two voices stopped cold. Evidently, they had heard the creaking, too!

"I caught a tantalizing glimpse of the two



speakers, but both had their backs turned to the stair and appeared to be in disguise, as well. I didn't recognize either, though the voices were definitely ones I had heard before, both in person and on the telephone...

* * *

"Who's next?"

"The committee votes tomorrow, after all the

con reports are filed.

"I hope it's Lewisohn. Can't you just see *Flotsam* in the next FAPS mailing?"

"The other grunted assent. I went back up the stairs to the 14th floor, hurried back along the passage, and took the elevator to the room.

* * *

"By the next morning, I'd dismissed the whole incident. Half-heard conversations, after all, are easily misinterpreted. I didn't even mention it to Gloria, who in any case had matters others than the fate on fandom on her mind when I finally returned to our room.

* * *

"Imagine my surprise when, a few days after *Rockon*, *Focus* arrived with the announcement that Jim Lewisohn had announced his gafiation due to the press of work and increased demands on his personal time. The front-page news story went on to elaborate on Lewisohn's gafiation. He'd summarily folded *Flotsam* and resigned from SAPS.

The last third of the article contains speculations on what I dubbed Elder Fandom, its relationship to our own hobby, and the purposes behind the activities of the elder fans.

Admittedly, the article's speculations and conclusions may have seemed farfetched to the uninitiated, but it is uncanny how many of my guesses about the nature and intentions of the elder fans subsequent scientific research has confirmed. Experts in post-nasal hypnotic regression theorize that the concepts I articulated in that fateful article came to me through paranormal senses; that my latent cosmic powers apprehended the conversation in the stairwell on a slant-like level that is transparent to a non-fan or even one less versed in the arcane symbolism of "The Immortal Storm"

Chapter Two: The Truth Destroys

My life began to fall apart the day *Lan's Lantern* arrived in fannish mailboxes. I don't know how everyone zero'd in on "Super Fans Among Us" even though the three-page piece was tucked anonymously between the fanzine reviews and the con reports on pages 273 to 275.

The phone started ringing that afternoon. Some of the callers just laughed uproariously, one called me a stupid dork, and another told me that fandom couldn't

expect more from someone who couldn't run off a stencil without hemorrhaging ink. Most of the callers just breathed heavily, but in an unmistakably fannish way.

Friday's mail brought three notes rescinding trades with *Wouser* and a terse note from a long-time artist friend asking for all illos remaining in my files. I sent the artwork back with a note asking what I'd done to offend him, but I never received a reply – or any further communication from him.

The Garnischcon that weekend was a debacle from my introduction at the opening session as "Claude Degler Jr." to the chants of, "Cosman! Super Fan!" every time I walked into a room party.

I began to realize that the situation was rapidly getting out of hand at the first party Gloria and I attended Friday night. I don't expect folks to clap and cheer when I enter a room the way they do for Steve Stiles, but I wasn't prepared to be totally ignored.

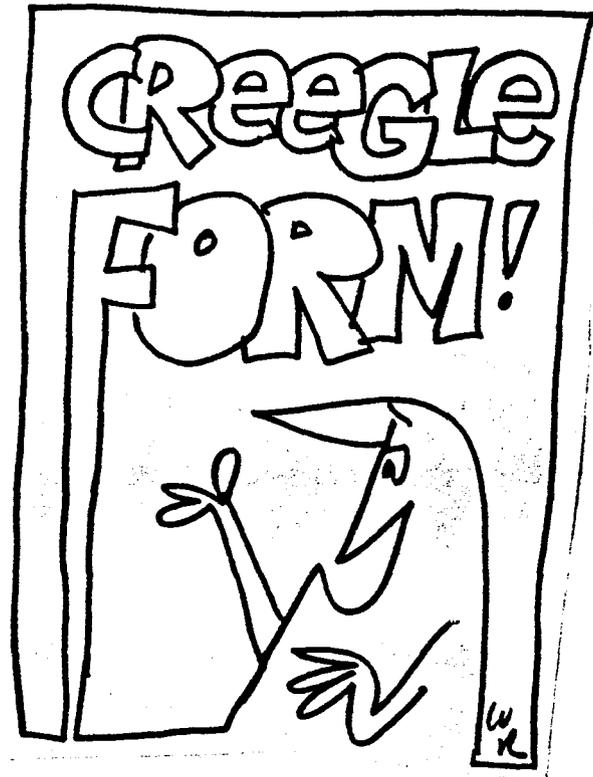
No one in that room full of fans even looked at me directly. They kept stealing sideways glances, as though I had suddenly grown an extra head. I moved from one little conversational knot to another, but no one addressed so much as a "hello" in my direction. This is what it must've been like for Bill Donaho after the Boondoggle, I thought as I settled into a chair in the corner and pretended to be engrossed in contemplating the infinite.

I saw Geri Sullivan scurry up to Gloria, whisper something in her ear, and retreat to the opposite end of the room. "What did she say?" I asked my wife when the tide of the party swept her into my deserted corner. My voice sounded strained, even to me, and I realized with a shock that I hadn't spoken to anyone in about an hour.

Gloria stammered, and I saw the telltale handwringing that always signals something unpleasant. I repeated my question. She looked away, but I saw the tear slide down her cheek. "She wanted me to know that no one held your article against me personally, and that I was always welcome," Gloria finally told me.

"Well, have a good time," I said as I lurched from the chair and strode out of the room. I spent the rest of the evening in the room, reading "Beyond the Enchanted Duplicator" and waiting for Gloria to come back from the party.

She didn't. She started drinking after I left, probably from mortification, and spent the night with two college students from Newark, Delaware. The only time I saw her after she went back to



Delaware with them on Sunday was when the three of them drove up the apartment to pick up the rest of her stuff. She smiled apologetically all the while she was packing.

By that time, copies of *Wouser* marked "refused by addressee" began to trickle into my mailbox. The issue drew only one genuine letter of comment, one of Harry Warner's usual erudite pages, and a few that resembled kidnap notes. It's amazing the venom some can squeeze out of a photocopier.

I lost the FAPA election for OE, three regional cons returned my registration cards, and I got a telegram from the host of the Planeteers advising me that it might be a good idea to skip a few meetings "for the good of the club," until the furor over "Super Fans Among Us" died down.

My fannish contacts dwindled to virtually nothing. Between the people who were avoiding me because of Gloria and my bust-up and those who thought I'd gone crazy over the subject of gafiated fans, there weren't a whole lot of folks writing or visiting our formerly bustling apartment.

One night, when I'd had a few too many blogs and was feeling a little sorry for myself, I sunk to the depths of joining the N3F. Even that didn't work. I got six letters from members of the Welcomittee – all telling me that, in fact, I was not welcome. One guy even advised me to take up stamp collecting.

"Fafia" took on a special new meaning. My formerly sterling reputation as a writer, editor, lecher, and insurgent gave way to a new one.

I started staying home a lot, since I suddenly had no one to visit. I'd sit in front of the word processor, trying to think of a way to restore myself to fandom's good graces and not finding it. I drank a lot in those terrible months of isolation, so the days slid past in a blur.

A co-worker, noting my emotional state and deteriorating physical condition, suggested professional help. It sounded like a good idea, so I wrote to several professionals I knew in the SFWA. Silverberg said he didn't think the theme had enough universality to make a salable novel, Zelazny was understanding, but could offer no advice, and Whitley Strieber said I ought to stop intruding on his game before he hung up on me.

Psychiatry didn't do anything for me, either. I went to see an eminent practitioner. "There's is nothing wrong with you!" he shouted, waving his arms theatrically.

"There isn't?"

"No, your story is perfectly possible, and I have encountered many similar ones!" It was as though someone had opened a jailhouse door and allowed me to walk back into the sunshine.

He believed me! He said I wasn't nuts! The appointment buoyed my spirits beyond my wildest expectations.

"I will introduce you to a group next week. This group is composed of people, like yourself, who have had a brush with the unknown. You will feel comfortable and more normal within this group. The people in the group will tell you their stories and listen to yours with sympathy." It sounded good, so I made arrangements to go to the next meeting of the Close Encounters Group.

I know what they say about people in glass fanzines, so I won't do the mini-article of the type that once came so easily to my word processor. Suffice to say that if the people who think I am crazy met the rest of the Close Encounters Group, they might be willing to re-evaluate my standing on the mental health scale.

I'll admit that the idea of another fandom which looks down upon ours and manipulates it for its own inscrutable purposes is not easy to swallow but I thought someone would have to heinlich me after the frowsy middle aged woman to my left explained her life as an alien marooned on Earth.

Her story wasn't the weirdest one I heard that night. It was, however, quite typical of the group. The room was full of people who'd ridden on space ships, received invisible implants from extraterrestrial surgeons, and heard telepathic communications from Whitley Strieber himself.

I was tempted to ask if anyone had seen Tucker's 10 of clubs, the one with the earmuffs, but thought better of it. I don't think these folks thought anything about their stories was funny.

When I got home after the group session, I sat on the front porch and watched the stars and thought about my situation. I knew that I sounded no more credible to the average fan than the gentleman whose wife lives on Jupiter sounded to me.

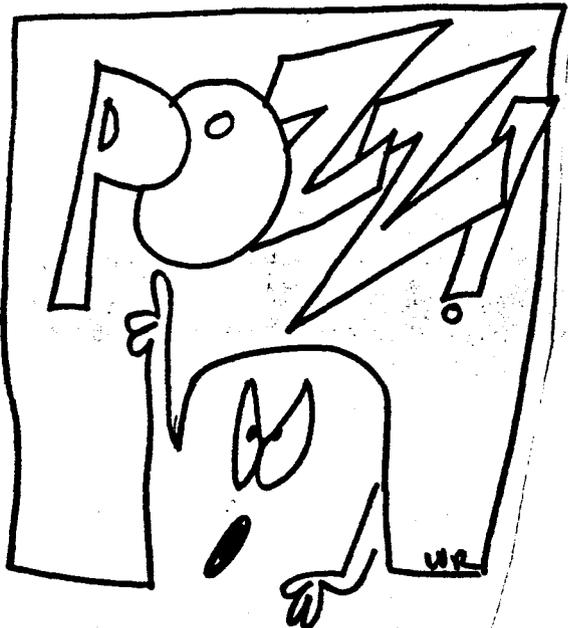
I came to a tough conclusion that night, one which shaped many days and nights to follow. I resolved to bend every effort to prove – or disprove – my Elder Fandom theory.

Chapter Three: Finding the Truth

I sold the house, cashed in my stock portfolio, and took a one-year sabbatical from my newspaper job.

I wasn't sure exactly what made me think of it, but I decided to pay a visit to a non-fan acquaintance, Sheldon Goniff. A printer by trade, he had a lot of contacts in the shadow world of quasi-criminality. For a surprisingly modest fee, he fixed me up with a





driver's license, birth certificate and social security card for "Thaddeus B. Steffan". I shaved my moustache, switched from contacts to glasses, and dyed my temples a distinguished gray.

This disguise wouldn't fool any of my erstwhile friends, but I didn't expect to meet any of them. My target was the Elder Fandomites, and few of them were likely to have met me in recent years. I wanted to cloak my identity to make it difficult for anyone to connect the curious stranger with the guy who'd written the now-infamous "Super Fans Among Us".

Before I closed up the house and put everything in storage, I went through my fanzine collection. I knew I'd find no blatant mentions of Elder Fandom, but I was hoping to spot its spoor. Specifically, I looked for famous fans who had suddenly gaffiated or fafiated.

After some thought, I expanded my research to include all the BNFs who'd died since 1960. For good measure, I threw in major fans who had gaffiated for at least five years before coming back strong.

I assembled a profile of each fan, complete with last known address and whatever biographical details I could glean from their fanzines. I spent a solid week coding everything into a database. I sold

my Macintosh II and bought a portable and hit the road. I visited several major fan centers of the past and present, plus a few out of the way places like Bellfontaine, Ohio, and Panama City, Florida.

I won't bore you with the details of my research methods. It was the usual stuff, the things I'd done for 10 years on the *Newark News*. I checked newspaper archives, hall of records, the motor vehicle bureau, and other official sources of information. I looked into the circumstances surrounding every fannish death and interviewed neighbors of living ex-fans on various pretext. Where previous acquaintance did not preclude it, I personally questioned the gaffiates.

And, no, I didn't go strolling up to Bob Leman or Roger Ebert and say something like, "So, are you a member of a secret super fandom?" Using whatever cover story was appropriate to the occasion, I did wide-ranging interviews which nevertheless uncovered a lot about their personal day-to-day habits. I tried to find out which subjects owned a mimeograph or bought desktop publishing software for their computers or disappeared for long weekends on a regular basis.

After the first 90 days, I was convinced I was onto something big. Hard facts weren't easy to get, but circumstantial evidence filled disk after disk. I decided to take a week off to assimilate and collate the data. I also needed to plan my next move.

My research had unearthed some disturbing facts. Some fans appeared to have gaffiated precisely as claimed. Most of the deaths were real, but I'd expected that. People, even wonderful people, die. My Elder Fandom theory did not require immortality.

After I subtracted legitimately gaffiated BNFs and verified numerous deaths to my complete satisfaction, there was a residue. In my mind, I knew that residue was Elder Fandom.

The Residue. How I pored over the dossiers I had compiled on each of them! All had unexplained absences from home— and the weekend *before* Labor Day was the absence that the neighbors most readily remembered. They all thought it was strange that these people always went away before one of the year's biggest holiday weekends.

It made sense for Elder Fandom to meet just before the SF Worldcon, I reasoned, because that way they could discuss us before sending agents to our convention to subtly mold and shape our fandom.

Only a few actually owned Gestetners, A.B. Dicks,

or Rex Rotarys.. The mimeographers, I learned from cooperative stationery store clerks, generally bought a lot of paper and ink. Further research showed that none of them published anything for any visible organization, club, or religious organization. A few were teachers and ran off tests and outlines, but not nearly enough stuff to account for the mammoth expenditures on mimeo supplies. One thing's for sure, clerks remember guys who buy four quires of stencils, a case of ink, and two 10-ream cartons of canary twitone at a time. Most of the mimeograph owners were older; perhaps some weren't comfortable with computerized fanpublishing.

More often, they had computers and desktop publishing software. Again, none of these secret fans produced any visible newsletter or other publication. Surveillance of the most likely candidates led me to quick-print shops. It didn't take much prodding to get copy machine operators to mention their eccentric customer who prints his or her own little magazine.

Then one day, at Nocture Printing of Norman, Oklahoma, I struck pay-dirt. Encouraged by my interest in fine printing, the clerk, Sally Adkisson, remarked that the man she'd just described had picked up a magazine that very day.

"Do you have any waste sheets left over? I'd love to see what he's doing in the small publishing field.

We're considering this upcoming issue of his for the Degler Golden Prize," I told her earnestly. Early, she had somehow received the impression that I represented the Claude Degler Golden Memorial Prize Committee.

She did! I could not believe my eyes. Here, at last, was incontrovertible proof that I had not imagined the whole thing.. He'd been gafia for years, and here was some kind of apazine. And it was full of mailing comments, public messages addressed to a bunch of fans whom everyone knew were gafia or dead.

They called their apa FAPS The Fannish Amateur Press Society, and it seemed to be the hub, or at the very least a hub, of Elder Fandom. I sweet talked Sally into giving me the loose sheets as samples, so I could show the other committee members the treat in store for them.

Extracting information from these random pages was neo's play for someone who could analyze *The Fantasy Amateur* roster in 15 minutes and decipher the *Fune* fanzine review code in under a day. I worked the incomplete FAPSzine against my dossiers and soon had a list of 20 active members of this supposedly non-existent group.

I stayed up all night, making notes on the FAPSzine fragment. The fragment In the calmness of an early morning in a Motel Six, I realized a painful truth: These pages, interesting as they were

to me, would never satisfy the skeptics. "You wrote this stuff yourself," they'd jeer.

I'd need a lot more proof to convince Ted White or Dave Langford. I hit the road again, this time concentrating on the members of FAPS whom I'd identified from the fanzine pages.

Finally, in a little town in rural Missouri, Poplar Bluff, I positively identified the Official Editor of FAPS. Who else would buy padded mailing envelopes by the hundred?

That night, I am not to ashamed to say, I celebrated. I temporarily put aside my quest for the truth about Elder Fandom and got ripped at a little roadhouse on the highway on the outskirts of town.

In my blitzed condition, I



suddenly realized it had been a long time since U'd seen Gloria, so I drove the rented Honda Civic to the town's notorious sin parlor, the Doom Rooms. As an ultimate irony, my quarry's car was parked at the curb. And just as my companion Cally was demonstrating her oral prowess, a famous braying laugh that fandom had not heard in years shook the flimsy walls of the brothel!

His car was still parked outside after I gave Cally her well-earned fee, plus a tip, and went back into the simmering Poplar Bluff night. I looked at his car, sitting there, and I knew what I was going to do. Maybe it was the booze working on my empty stomach, but I had to have one of those mailings!

I drove to his house. The porch light burned, and there was another lamp lit in a bedroom window, but I could tell no one was home. Evidently, his multiple marriages had left him a confirmed bachelor in his later life. I parked the car a ways up the street, killed the engine, and walked to the house. I rattled the front door. No luck. With a quick glance up and down the empty street, I hurried around the outside of the house and found a side door that led to the garage.

It opened! I slipped into the garage. I moved slowly in the darkness, my fingers searching the wall near the door for the light switch. When I felt it, I held my breath and flipped the switch. To my relief, a single weak bulb in the ceiling threw feeble light on floor to ceiling shelves lining both walls of the two-car garage.

Perfect! No one could possibly see this feeble illumination through cracks at the bottom of the solid metal garage door.

I turned my attention to the shelves, and my heart almost stopped. If I'd had a truck, I could have taken a first-class collection of Elder Fandom fanzines to the next worldcon. That would have shocked the fans who had turned their backs on me so unfairly.

I guess the adrenaline had started to burn the alcohol out of my system by this time, because I realized that it was just as well I didn't have the truck. Swiping the whole collection would have alerted its owner to my investigation, and he was known as a ruthless man. Far better, I acknowledged to myself, to take a few selected items.

Knowing that he would return from the Doom Rooms at any moment shook me out of this reverie. I began to scan the shelves of bound volumes and

solidly packed manila folders. I took a huge black bound book labelled "A Scintillation of FAPS" and another marked "The Circlapedia". I passed over the bound volumes of *Vega* and *Acolyte* and *QAR*, but I couldn't resist a book with a dust jacket that proclaimed it "The Ninth Stage of Fandom". I knew it wouldn't have much information, but I needed a few good laughs.

He would probably discover that books were missing within a couple of days, but I hoped he'd just figure he'd misplaced them somewhere around the house. I doused the light and left the same way I had entered. Just as I settled behind the wheel of my Honda, I saw his lights come down the street and scrunched down as low as I could in my little car. His Nissan 280Z swung into the driveway, the garage door raised, and the automobile slid from sight with one final gun of its powerful engine.

The minute he was out of sight, I started the Honda and drove slowly down the street with the lights off. I flipped them on when I reached the corner, and rushed back to my room at the Drury Inn.

My partying had me ready to collapse, but I couldn't sleep with those books sitting there, waiting for me. I went down to the coffee shop, which was mercifully still open, and ordered coffee. I drank it black and ordered another to go. It was going to be a long night.

Chapter Four: Illumination

Putting aside "The Ninth Stage of Fandom" as a reward for later, I attacked the two hefty volumes. As I expected, "A Scintillation of FAPS" was an anthology of "the first 100 mailings of the Fannish Amateur Press Society". "The Circlapedia" was their version of the Speer and Eney compendium. Between the two of them, it wasn't hard to get a pretty good sense of what Elder Fandom — or "The Circle" as its members called it.

It was all there! I read of the founding of the Circle after the Pacificon in 1946 failed to endorse the Fantasy Foundation, and the birth of FAPS as a communications for The Circle's 100 active members.

I started with "A Scintillation of FAPS" and studied the arguments for maintaining secrecy from our "argumentative and juvenile fandom full of misfits, sexual deviates, and bums" as fandom's one-time stormy petrel wrote in his introduction to "A



Scintillation of FAPS". This policy, evidently still a minor source of controversy among some of the super fans, had led to the Transformation Project. A rotating committee of volunteers monitors Mundane Fandom, as Circlans call our version of the hobby, and guide it toward eventual re-union with The Circle at some future, unspecified date.

The idealism behind the movement was undeniable, but it boiled down to a lot of meddling. The tinkering began with a unanimous vote to send a letter to Mr. Ziff explaining the scientific inconsistencies in the Shaver Mystery. Then had come the planting of the small printing press in an otherwise nondescript Belfast shop. A more recent example was the decision, in the late 1960s, to rid Mundane Fandom of one of its more boisterous fuggheads. The chemically altered brain of this self-proclaimed sociologist has now utterly forgotten his whirlwind rampage through fandom.

The merits of these manipulations could be defended, though some of the other alterations in our fandom wrought by The Circle were not as easy to justify. I read of forced gaffations, instigation of divorces and separations and waylaying of selected issues of fanzines to isolate individuals to whom The Circle raised objection. I wondered if they had somehow sensed my discovery at the convention and caused Gloria to depart for Delaware.

Another article, titled "They went Back" described Circlans who had swapped Mundane Fandom for the more exalted group, and then returned to their original stomping ground. It explained the rationale behind the so-called "Death Hoaxes" and told of the decisions by first Tucker and then Willis to return to the fandom they loved, our fandom, after Alpaugh and Kennedy had faked their deaths.

Then I turned to "The Circlapedia", a 640-page dictionary of The Circle's history, customs, and

jargon. It was full of incredible material like a list of Circlecons since 1948, charts showing the winners of the FAPS Laureate Poll since 1955, photos of the Tuckercon Hotel and Convention Center in Pocatello, Idaho.

I was a shaken man by the time the sun rose over Poplar Bluff. It is one thing to propose a theory, but it is quite another to see it transformed into truth right before your eyes. I checked out and carefully stashed the three precious volumes under the driver's seat.

Next Time: Inside The Circle

As soon as I get access to a digital scanner, I will put together *Wowser #8* with goodies culled from "A Scintillation of FAPS". Wait till you read Laney's "After the Idiocy", Dean Grennell's Trans-Oceanic Fan Fund report, and Bill Kunkel's "Life Over the Edge".

And I'm going to keep publishing — and keep moving. I don't guess The Circle will appreciate my efforts to restore my good name in fandom, and I won't let them stop me until I have shared every secret, every nuance of this close-knit cult of super fans. I'll be bringing the three books I took from Poplar Bluff to next month's worldcon so that even the most cynical fans can verify their authenticity with their own eyes.

More fascinating facts and startling revelations in 30 days. Keep watching the mails.

— Joe Walcott
Western U.S.
August 15, 199-

Postscript from Arnie...

I received the preceding manuscript on disk from Joe Walcott. A week later, I got a postcard which read (in part:

"I've changed my mind, Arnie. I'm not going to the convention. You might as well trash the article."

"Might as well" doesn't mean "must", or so I keep telling myself. So I'm going to print it. I figure this is something *Folly* readers would Want to Know.

Inner Tube
Continued from page 5

appropriate to Hitchcockian suspense films. For what seemed like months, I couldn't get this anonymous sufferer's cranky plaint stayed in my mind. Bill Kunkel's incessant repetition of it aided the process, but I'm sure I would have heard its mental echoes regardless.

My current favorite is familiar only to readers in the Southwest and southern California. The Carl's Junior restaurant chain invented spokesman Mr. Beef for its new roast beef sandwich. At the end of each commercial, Mr Beef stares into the camera and tells the viewer to buy this roast beef sandwich, or he'll "hunt you down like a wild animal." The

breath-taking affrontery of this appeal has etched it into my mind forever.

More often, commercials stick because they are exceptionally annoying or downright silly. I often watch sitcom reruns on Hal the comedy network, so I endure many repetitions of a commercial for a show on its sister network, Nickelodeon, "SK8 TV". The memorable line leads off: "If you live, eat, sleep, breath, puke Skateboarding..."

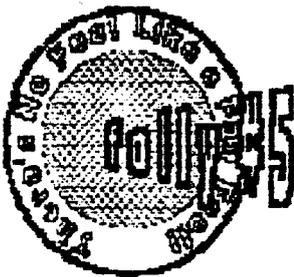
Despite my inability to share in the announcer's glee over this half-hour celebration of teenage thasherhood, the commercial has seduced my allegiance. I now consider myself a mental thrasher. When I even *think* of skateboarding, I puke.

Medical Update

As evidence makes obvious, I couldn't finish *Folly* before my surgery on February 26. That was about the only thing that went awry, however.

The operation appears to be a success. Three weeks into recuperation, my vision is 20/100 without correction. That's the best it has ever been. Near vision requires glasses. Please foregive this small issue.

Reading is still too hard to enter contributions, edit the letter column, or reply to correspondence. I expect to reach Full Strength by next issue, so I hope you'll be patient for a little longer.



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