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EXTRA

Four Star Extra, Volume 1 Number 2, is brought to you by that hedonistic-to-the-hilt quartet, Joyce & Arnie Katz (59 Livingston St., Apt. 6B, Brooklyn, N.Y. 11201) and Bill & Charlene Kunkel (85-30 121st St., Kew Gardens, N.Y. 11415). Published on an irregular basis, it is sent to the 75 people on our mailing list with our compliments. Reviewers Please Note: Four Star Extra is not available for money. All funds received as a result of our "World of Kids" issue will be spent on penny candy, comic books, baseball cards and other appropriate fripperies. We will feel no guilt.

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FOUR OUR THEME: PLAY THE WORLD OF KIDS

Arnie: Let me admit right at the start of this joint editorial for the "World of Kids" issue of Four Star Extra that the quartet of luminaries bringing you this fanmag have, among them, exactly zero children. Only the childless can preserve the golden vision of youth so necessary to the success of this undertaking, untainted by exposure to actual kids.

All of us are, however, indulgent aunts and uncles. That means we get to play "good guy" to the little tykes now and again when it suits our fancy. Besides, if we had kids, they'd just want to play with our toys.

Bill: Actually, I've got to confess to never having completely left Kidsville, USA, the fantastic place where you play pool and smoke cigarettes and eventually grow donkey ears, but what the hell. Why, just today I ripped up my hand during an afternoon of high-pressure Street Games: paddleball, stoopball, boxball, ace king queen ad infinitum.

We played two different types of stoopball. The first is the rather lame sort where you bounce the ball off the stoop and take five points per, and the second, more interesting, "baseball" variety, in which the offense player smashes the ball off the stoop and the dfender stands near the curb and attempts to catch it.

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I've always considered myself the Ron Hunt of Street Games -- my reaction time could be better, but I hustle. I run "em out. I give it all I got. I've got heart. And I'm always the first to touch the wall and let fly with a lusty, "Ham 'n Eggs!"

Arnie: And to cap your day, Bill, there was our First (and Last) Annual Baseball Card Flip-Out. We decided to see if we could recapture the Days of Our Youth by each taking 20 of the cards I bought for research and vying with each other in a veritable decathlon of card flipping events. We played them all, from "leaner" to "off-the-wall topsies." The final totals: Arnie - 46 cards; Joyce - 9 cards; Bill - 17 cards; and Charlene - 7 cards. You can judge our level of skill by the fact that this is only a total of 79 cards. It's funny about flipping. Guys hit their peak about 17 and then it's all down hill. Oh, they may get along on technique, but it's not quite the same thing.

Charlene: Well, Joyce and I don't have what you'd call extensive backgrounds in card flipping, and I feel there should've been a handicap set-up. Anyway, those were dumb games. Boys always played dumb games. Now, I played nice games as a little girl: touch football, wrestling, gymnastics on our backyard swing. Good games. To really capture the days of our youth, though, I feel we'd have to go out and find a good, old-fashioned candy store. (There are lots of them left in Queens and Brooklyn.) I honestly can't imagine a childhood without that kid's department store just a few blocks away. Where else could you blow your allowance on comic books, yo-yos, Pency Pinkies and an endless variety of candy cigarettes (not those lame chocolate ones -- ugh!), strips of buttons, licorice and other penny candies? And what would childhood be without the egg cream, I ask you?

Joyce: I've never had an egg cream, being the out-of-towner in the gang. However, there was a great store only a block from home -- "and look both ways when you cross the street" -- which not only had a lovely rolled-top penny candy display, but also a complete soda fountain and ice cream parlor, not that any of us had that kind of allowance, you understand. What we did have as an almost bottomless treasure trove was the local armory/civic center. It produced a steady stream of coke bottles we could turn in for 2¢. A couple of cartons of Pepsi bottles (2½¢) produced enough maryjanes and red-hots to keep you in sweets for a week.

Once our candy habit was staved off for the day, though, you'd be much more likely to find the kids in my neighborhood playing some kind of "let's pretend" game than anything sportive. We were very big on acting out adventures which, in some bizarre way, caused us to leap every neighborhood fence, cross every yard and go into the branches of at least three trees, in our search for villains, treasures, victims, whatever. We had only one cross-patch in our neighborhood who wouldn't let us play on her lot, so other than that one carefully avoided plot, we had full run of every yard and driveway. We even had a wilderness for Tarzan. Since the game basically consisted of telling a sort of adventure story as we moved from place to place, being a good reader really produced status points, I'll tell you. A few comics or a Jack London book could fire you up to be a game-leader for a whole summer vacation, recreating adventures to fit the need.

But after supper, when our parents wouldn't let us run so free and we had to stay in sight, we were big on Simon Sez, Red Light/Green Light and Rover, Red Rover. I also was King-of-the-Hill, I'm proud to announce, as well as top single rope jumper of the neighborhood.

Arnie: Now isn't that fantastic, folks? What other fanmag brings you an Instant Article by Joyce Katz? Have you ever wondered why that is? All this talk of kids' games reminds me that while I've read dozens of pieces about stickball, potsie and the rest, I can't remember reading nostalgic recollections of the

(Continued after Gas Giant)

ARNIE'S
KATZEN JAMMER BASEBALL BOY
MEETS THE
PERFECT KID

It was a typical spring Sunday morning in Brooklyn Heights. As Joyce and I walked hand in hand down historic Montague Street, we eyed the mysterious old people inching along on nebulous, aimless errands. We bestowed our cultivated sneers on the Lenny's Clam-Bar which had invaded the street's least chic block during the winter and then ducked into a stationery store to buy the Sunday papers.

There's nothing a New Yorker likes better on a Sunday than his favorite newspaper, whether the actual choice is the grey solidity of The New York Times or the multi-colored flash of The News, so the tiny store was packed with people waiting to cop their news-print fix

As the procession to the cash register moved me past the candy counter, I saw them there and my heart leapt within me. Suddenly I was eight years old again. It was Spring, and I was about to buy the season's first package of Topps Baseball Cards.

There is no sight more heartening to the male child than the year's first display of baseball cards. It means that you've made it through another brutal winter, school is all but done, and the endless idyl is about to begin.

Oh, there are lots of other trading cards these days: cards honoring other sports, cards for "Charlie's Angels" and "Happy Days" and, for all I know, pasteboard series devoted to a minute-by-minute recounting of the life of John Travolta. Still, there is nothing to match the panache of the baseball card.

When I was a kid, my love for baseball almost rivalled my passion for science fiction. Countless times I trudged home from the public library with a stack of books under each arm; one a little cache of Heinlein juveniles and the other a bundle of Duane Decker's sports stories.

It was a zesty mixture. I would first soar through an interstellar wonderland populated by annoyingly brilliant youths and their pedophillic guardians and then plunge without even pausing for breath into the glamorous, yet comradely, world of big league baseball. As Decker visualized the national pastime, there were no locker room punch-outs, no "play-me-or-trade-me" ultimata and no racism. It was the basic all-American myth in spike shoes: Every game was a tense pitchers' duel shattered only by the slugger's home run swing in the bottom of the ninth inning.

Although I was an avid fan of Decker's Blue Sox, no parade of fictional heroes could dim my ardor for the Brooklyn Dodgers. Although my parents didn't settle in Brooklyn until my father received his discharge from World War II, they took up the cause of the borough's favorite -- and only -- ball team with the enthusiasm of lifelong Brooklynites. I followed their example.

My parents gave lip service to the Jewish faith, but their real outpourings of religious zeal were reserved for the clashes between Our Beloved Bums and the hated Giants from far-off Manhattan. The conflict between the two clubs, which originated in the previous century, was only made sharper by the fact that Giants manager Leo Durocher had once held the same position for our team. The savior had fallen, only to rise again as the captain of an army of red-eyed demons.

Years of adversity in the 1920's and 1930's had taught Dodger rooters the virtue of having a sense of humor about the team, but when their Sal "The Barber" Magle scowled down at our Carl Furillo and everyone in the park knew the pitcher was even-money to put the next hard one in Carl's ear, things grew grim, indeed.

If the Dodgers were a religion, then Red Barber was rabbi and cantor rolled into one. You can have your Russ Hodges with his infernal "bYe, bye baby!" after every Giant home run or the Wall Street Yankees' Mel Allen and his "How about that?" Just give me the "ole redhead himself" with the sunny South dripping from every silver-tongued phrase. No one could beat Red Barber when it came to bringing the full flavor of baseball into the crowded apartments of Bushwick and Bensenhurst and Flatbush.

It's a good thing that Barber's ambitions appeared to ascend no higher than to chronicle the doings of Snider, Robinson, Reese and those other boys of summer, for had he commanded, the burghers of Brooklyn would have risen as one to do his bidding. His persuasive abilities were so powerful that even my mother, who only drank on state occasions, succumbed to his dulcet tones. One day, between games of a doubleheader, she forced my father to truck down to the market and bring her back a six-pack of Schaefer Beer. Her desire for what Red always called "a frosty cold bottle of Schaefer's" was undiminished by the fact that she had never previously in her life tasted beer.

As I look back on it, I believe her feelings for Schaefer Beer were not dissimilar from those Catholics have about the wine and wafer of communion. Who cares if the priest is dishing out an impudent, though wryly amusing little burgundy? It's the symbolism that counts.

I saw my first live baseball game in 1950 at the tender age of four and was a confirmed Dodger fan from that day forward. Ah, those sunny days and crisp evenings at Ebbetts Field. Surely it was the garden of eden for the true baseball fan! Every seat in the house was a good one, for the simple reason that Ebbetts Field was so small that it was impossible to get very far from the action.

Not that anyone was trying to maintain his distance. No Dodger partisan would haunt the "stadium club" to watch the game on television at the park as well-heeled Yankee fans sometimes do. Dodger rooters wanted to be as close to the game as possible, which sometimes was closer than enemy outfielders trying to lean into the seats to make a circus catch would have preferred.

As I grew older, it became obvious that I was not the heir-apparent to Gil Hedges at first base. My vision was so bad I had trouble even following the ball, let alone doing anything meaningful with it. In compensation, I became that oddest of all baseball fan types, the figure filbert. When someone wondered aloud how many homers Snider had hit in 1955, I was the little squirt who blurted out the total, as well as the name of every pitcher who had served the Duke of Flatbush a gopher ball during that particular year.

So you might say I was primed for baseball cards the first time I saw them sitting on a fly-specked candy counter next to the Bazooka gum. And once I had actually forked over my minuscule allowance -- I was hooked. As the years flew by and my allowance in-

Katzenjammer - III

creased, I bought them in ever greater volume, endlessly straining to achieve the golden goal: The Whole Set.

Some of the more naive youngsters may have been hoping to get a Stan Musial card, but most of my crowd realized that to obtain one copy of each and every card issued in a particular year was the be-all and end-all of existence. Our disdain for the yahoos who readily traded the rare card of a baseball nonentity for the easy-to-find card of some superstar knew no depths.

I pursued this white whale each summer with the monomania of a pint-sized Ahab. I was a total slave to this habit from the day the first series of the new year's set went on sale to the black afternoon when they vanished for the year to be replaced by boxes of cards depicting great crippled movie stars of the 1940's -- or whatever else Topps Chewing Gum Company scrounged up to fill the months between baseball seasons.

The truly dedicated are sometimes rewarded for their doggedness, and I usually managed to compile the whole set through a mixture of persistent buying, shrewd trading and skillful flipping. What the Arnie Katz of the period might have said about the companies which today do a lively business by supplying mint whole sets by mail to so-called collectors may only be guessed.

Little did I realize, as I filled shoe box after shoe box with cards and the pile of rock-hard pink slabs of bubblegum grew ever higher in the refrigerator, that I was marching in a line of kids which stretched back to the 1880's.

They must have had some resourceful youngsters back then, because the first baseball cards were included as a premium in packs of Old Judge cigarettes. No sir, the true love of baseball and the hoarding instincts of a pack rat weren't enough for collectors in those bygone days. You also had to be machiavellian enough to manipulate your father into choosing the right brand of cigarettes. Who knows how many baseball card-hungry kids started their non-smoking fathers along the merry road to throat cancer just to get hold of a cheap lithograph of "Cap" Anson, Cy Young or one of the other stars of baseball's stone age? And who can ever guess the effect on the lives of squirts whose old man insisted on buying the coffin nails which included those little photos of roguish bathing beauties instead of Wee Willie Keeler?

On the other hand, when I started collecting in 1954, I would have been stunned to learn that the Topps Chewing Gum Company had not been making their pasteboards since the beginning of time. In point of fact, the Brooklyn-based manufacturer had only issued its first series of cards in 1951. It wasn't until the following year that the baseball card as I knew it in my youth -- and as kids know it today -- made its first appearance.

By the time my allowance began to figure prominently in Topps' annual financial statement, the company had succeeded in putting all of its national and regional competitors right to the wall. I only recall seeing one box of off-brand baseball cards during the 1950's. It was a series put out by soon-to-be-bankrupt Bowman, which I found at the most disreputable of the local candy stores. No one else would touch Bowman's merchandise, at least in my town.

Those Bowman cards may actually have been ahead of their time. They were distinguished by their portrayal of each player framed by a T.V. screen. Had the Bowman people been as good at running their business as at predicting the overwhelming influence television would one day exert on professional sports, the company would probably have remained in business to this day.

Katzenjammer - IV

But they didn't, so it was Topps baseball cards which filled our spring and summer days in sleepy New Hyde Park where I grew up. Flipping had such a stranglehold on kid culture that kindly teachers would sometimes allow us to practice this art on school time on particularly sultry May afternoons.

Some of the more gently raised teachers failed to grasp the essence of flipping. One gentle soul, a Miss Clontz, actually expected me to return cards won in honest gambling just because I'd borrowed a card from a local pigeon to get started.

There are almost as many card flipping games as there are kids. Some are crass and unsubtle like "Long Distance," in which contestants try to scale their cards as far as they can. Others such as "Tpsies" required considerable finesse in order to scale a card so that it landed atop one already on the field of play.

But the game of games is "Match-Unmatch" -- or just plain "Matchies" as some call it. Like all classic games, it is deceptively simple. Holding a card by its edges with the fingertips, the player allows it to flutter end over end to the ground. The flipper then challenges his opponent to either duplicate his flip (match) or flip a card so that it lands with the opposite side up (unmatch).

I learned the true science of match-unmatch from a lad who brought the same dedication and skill to his chosen craft as Eric Clapton to the electric guitar or Linda Lovelace to giving head. His name was Harvey Allen.

Harvey was my neighborhood's concensus choice for All-Time Perfect Kid. He was so far above the other young denizens of New Hyde Park that it was regarded as a kind of miracle that his parents allowed him to mix with us indiscriminately. In truth, the Allens eventually relocated to a much ritzier area, forever hiding the ideal he embodied from our eyes.

Harvey was as fine a schoolyard athlete as I have ever seen. When kids chose up sides for anything from baseball to capture the flag, there was no doubt about who would captain one of the teams. Not only did he star on both diamond and gridiron, but Harvey was also a natural leader of men -- or at least of boys -- who handled sluggers and automatic outs with equal facility.

The physically puny often hold the belief that they are, by way of compensation, mentally superior to the athletically inclined. The bookworms, introverts and terminal acne sufferers are wont to gather in little knots and smirk up their collective sleeve at what they are pleased to believe is the stupidity of the boys who score the touch-downs and smash the homers

Granted that this is sometimes an accurate observation, but the star pitcher all too often proves equally stellar in the classroom. Harvey carried this to an extreme; he was brilliant. The only time I ever saw him lose his composure was when we were in the fifth grade. He broke down and cried right there in class over missing a test question for the first time since he started school.

As befitted one of his lofty intellect, Harvey developed a system for unerringly flipping baseball cards. The prodigy reasoned that if he standardized his method of releasing the card, they would turn over precisely the same number of times on their way to the ground and produce exactly the same result.

He practiced day after day in the privacy of his bedroom until he could toss down

Katzenjammer - V

about 74 consecutive heads or a like number of tails. He demonstrated this talent to me one afternoon at his house while separating me from a stack of duplicates I'd brought over for flipping.

For a while, Harvey was like a natural force loosed upon the neighborhood. Winning cards from Harvey was out of the question. You worked at losing as gamely as possible, flipping away the minimum number of cards in the maximum amount of time.

Harvey's total success was ultimately his undoing. Kids watched the mechanical perfection of his card flipping -- and quit playing match-unmatch with him. He'd suggest a little flipping, and right away the prospective mark would start touting the glories of topsies, long distance or, in short, anything but the game Harvey had mastered so completely.

In other types of flipping, Harvey had only the 60% to 70% success chance of the typical superstar flipper. Since the other games move at a slower pace than match-unmatch, it was possible for the accomplished player to cheat Harvey of his full levy of cards through a delaying action cunningly planned to intersect the Allens' dinner hour.

His achilles heel was one commonly found among those who don't have to strive and grub for their supremacy. He was great when it came to ideas, but he didn't really understand the common man. He had not yet learned the lesson that the guy with the best brain is not necessarily the most successful.

One day, while practicing my flipping, it came to me in a burst of inspiration: Harvey's trouble was that he was too good! Knowing his infallibility, they resigned from the contest before it even began. I'd spent hours studying his system, but I realized, in a burst of mental clarity, that it wasn't going to do me any more good than it was doing him.

Through repetitive practice, I developed the technique of flipping the card while swinging my arm in an arc. Once I got my chops down, this casual-appearing method produced the desired result about 90% of the time. This was sufficient to provide me with hundreds of duplicates for resale to finance purchases of new cards.

The beginning of the end of my card collecting came when I figured out that each box of 24 packages contained at least one copy of every card in the series then on sale. Baseball cards weren't the same after that, somehow. Just another case of intellect souring romance.

I was thinking about all this while waiting to buy my New York Times. On impulse, I scooped up a handful of the brightly wrapped baseball card packages. "It's for research," I told Joyce.

As we walked back home the way we had come, I began thinking of exactly the form the "research" would take. "Hi, here are some baseball cards," I'd say to Bill and Charl when they arrived for their next visit. Then, after a decent interval, I would say, as nonchalantly as possible, "Let's flip cards."

And then I would clean them out. Ah, the simple joys of youth!

-- Arnie Katz

BILL'S

POWER HOW SQUARE TO BE THE BATMAN

"Spiderman, Spiderman
does whatever a spider can.
Is he strong?
Listen, bud,
he's got radioactive blood!"

-theme from the Spiderman cartoon show

One of those things that's apparently common to almost all kids, is the perception that it sure would be great to have super-powers. Like Superman, the Hulk, and Gene Simmons. My nephew, B.J., who's two-and-a-half, wants to be Spiderman, having been enraptured by the TV cartoon show. Whenever you do something to which he objects, he aims his web-shooters at you, makes a noise like "ffffffttttt!", and binds you in the super-strong strands of his imaginary webbing. And then, he walks away.

"Hey!" I called after him once. "I'm all webbed up!"

"Tough noogies," he rejoindered.

Now on Charlene's side of the family, my niece Tiffany LaVerda (nee Lavender) wants to be the Hulk. Or perhaps Chewbacca. She recently learned that Chewie and Darth Vader and like that, were all costumes with men inside them. Keeping this in mind, she therefore concluded that TV's Hulk was really Bill Bixby in some latex Lou Ferrigno suit. Now this three-year-old kid freaks out every time she sees body builders, giggling but still profoundly impressed at what neat costumes these guys have on.

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Myself, I always wanted to be the Batman.

First off, no super powers were required. Fine by me. I had already abandoned all hope of having come from another planet (and, if I had, so what?, since it was obviously just a duplicate Earth -- no different gravity, red sun, nothing!) and the odds on being in just the right place at just the right moment when some Great Experiment went awry, seemed slim to the point of non-existence.

But Bats was born right here, in a comic book version of New York, had ten fingers, ten toes, two ears, etc. In fact, the only thing he had that I didn't was independent wealth. However, even at that tender age, I immediately realized that this was going to be a problem, only if I let it be. Hell, a member of the Middle Class can be just as pathologically obsessive as a Blue Blood! No, I right away spotted the true fly in the ointment of my dream: my parents had never

been gunned down on the way home from the theater before my horrified eyes.

I could already see the problems beginning to spin-off. For one thing, my parents never went to the theater. But I decided that the movies would do. Then, I couldn't get them to agree on a flick, and even when I did, nobody shot them! So okay, let 'em live, if they're gonna be that way about it, I decided. Besides, I already had my motivation -- I wanted to see cheap hoods reduced to puddles of drippy snot at their first glimpse of my shadow. I wanted to swing through the concrete canyons, just as my Ideel, Tarzan, swung through the jungle. I wanted all those nifty computers and microscopes and suchlike tools of criminal science. I WANTED TO BE THE BATMAN!

The actual difficulties caused by two live parents were more in the nature of Secret Identity stuff. Hell, if I got up to go the the john in the middle of the night, one of them would stir! How was I supposed to keep up a secret life, much less an authentic Bat Cave in the sub-cellar (also, we didn't have a sub-cellar, and I later considered both the nearby railroad tracks as well as our roof in my search for the perfect Sanctum Sanctorum)? I decided that I would need a confederate, a la Robin, the Boy Wonder. I chose my sister, Karen.

The training of a Boy Wonder is rough business, made all the more so by the fact that Karen was neither boy nor wonder. In fact, she didn't even read comic books (or anything else, for that matter, being only four years old). Still, the idea of being able to wear a costume and accompany me on Night Patrol was sufficient to stir her interest. And, in the final analysis, we Darknight Detectives demand only one thing from our Boy Wonders: Loyalty. For when we finally caught up with our parents' murderers (you see, I hadn't given up all hope), I needed to know only that Karen/Robin would follow my every command, gleefully choosing death over disobedience. And our first test lay yet ahead.

Still, there was one thing that had still to be done. Becoming a perfect physical specimen could wait, I decided. So could honing my mind to razor sharpness, and developing the instantaneous reflexes so all-important to the crime-fighter. No, all that stuff could go on the back burner. What I needed was a costume!

And so I spent the better part of a day engaged in obtaining sheets and table cloths; cutting them up, and coloring them. Now unless you have ever tried working in that least-favorite of all artistic mediums -- ball point pen on wax paper -- then you have no idea how frustrating working with Binney & Smith Crayolas on linen can be. But I kept at it, hacking away wildly with the scissors until I finally wound up with four different capes, none of which were big enough even for Karen. Shrugging the fiasco off, however, I merely hung the failures in my closet. After all, in all those issues of Batman, he always had about a hundred different Cape & Cowl sets -- white ones (for snow), rubber ones (for skin-diving), black ones (for blending with shadows), leather ones (heh heh) -- none of which he ever got around to wearing. But they were real show-stoppers on those semi-annual "Tour of the Bat Cave" stories!

In any case, I did eventually triumph. The only problem was that, in ruining all those sheets, I had blown my chances of getting any more. It took me a full afternoon of pestering and agitating my mother, before she finally broke down and handed me "one last sheet". But it was one of those damned contour things, with elastic in all four corners, and it never did look right. I would stand in front of the mirror for hours, looking at it on me, wondering where I had gone wrong. Eventually, I decided that there were some secrets Bats just wasn't going to share with me, and that

was that. Regretfully, I hung up my cowl.

I don't remember the rest of that winter, but I presume I spent it doing the standard kid things engaged in by seven year old boys, in the process forgetting what had once been my most burning desire. And with Spring would come baseball, and school's out, and vacation in the mountains, and (most importantly) the DC Annuals! I vividly remember June 24th as both the last day of school, and the first day those 25¢ treasures would appear on candy store shelves.

My folks (who were still alive) were very good about rewarding us kids. We would get report cards four times a year, for which we received monetary rewards commensurate with our performance. A nice report card, especially on finals, could be a real wind-fall, but even half-assed grades would provide mucho candy and comics. However, I was still young and did not yet hate school. I tended toward A's, and this particular June, I had really topped myself. So, scarfing up my loot, I raced around the corner to Rappaport's, home of egg creams, penny candy, baseball cards, and --

-- comics! I was stunned. Couldn't move, I tell you. I had already seen the ad for the Superman Annual, so while it was a delight, it was no surprise. No, it was the Batman Annual that knocked my socks off! For there, on the cover, in big, yellow letters it read: HOW TO BE THE BATMAN!

It's been twenty years now since that day, but I can still dimly recall the explosion of sheer, unfettered joy I felt at that moment. I quickly grabbed up a copy, and hid the issues that remained behind the Millie the Model stack (no sense in having my competition picking up the secrets). I calmly paid my four bits as if I were merely purchasing another comic book -- not something that held a secret near as vital as life itself -- and walked out the door, into the sunshine of a bright, fresh summer.

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EPILOUGE

Life is full of disappointments. No, I never became the Batman. Actually, that story was about Bruce Wayne getting amnesia, and how Robin has to teach him everything all over again. Not exactly the blueprint I was expecting. But I have no complaints. I can still read a good comic and recapture, in intricate detail, the thrill of being a kid again. And I often think about the comics I write, as well. I think about soldiers on leave, picking up a copy in a bus depot to read on the way home. And I think about guys like myself, making no excuses, and enjoying themselves in a medium that survives through the perpetual enthusiasm of twelve year olds.

And a lot of times I think about seven year old kids trying to figure out just how in hell one goes about making a web-shooter.

-Bill Kunkel

JOYCE'S

BLUE EMILY'S JAUNT DOLLHOUSE

The modern American kid first learns to tie his shoe not on his own Buster Browns but on a child guidance plastic doohickey scientifically designed to train him in the art.

Similarly there's an owl-shaped clock who wisely speaks the time shown by the hands in its belly, and whose eyes open to show the time in numerals.

No well-heeled child could be expected to learn his numbers, say his ABC's, or turn a doorknob without the assistance of these marvels, and these surrogate teaching devices continue to bring skill and aptitude to little hands long after infancy is past.

Little boys soon give up hammering pegboards and start nailing down their fathers' shoes with the toy carpenter set that Aunt Mattie gave them. Little girls quit painting the dummy head that came with Barbie's Beauty Salon, and start smearing their own faces with the food-coloring cosmetics (guaranteed non-toxic.)

Perhaps no more wonderful teaching device exists than that one so long beloved of little girls--and big girls--everywhere, the miniature dollhouse. Dollhouses had their start in 17th century Europe with display cabinets which held collections of curiosities and rarities. Later the art of the dollhouse was considered a teaching aid to future homemakers, and "Nuremburg kitchens" were popular gifts to little girls, complete with tiny pots and sinks and rolling pins. It wasn't long however before entire households were miniaturized with a wave of someone's shrinking wand, or so it would seem.

When I was a wee tad, my mother set aside one shelf in our bookcase for me in which I carefully placed the items of doll furniture I had. I boasted an overstuffed couch and chair, a floor lamp, and perhaps a half dozen other pieces, and devoted many hours to playing with these tiny treasures.

That Christmas I was gifted with a genuine two-story, rolled metal, slope-roofed dollhouse, which I endlessly arranged and rearranged and carefully dusted and meticulously cared for. My old furniture was lovingly placed in it, and joined by elegant new pieces. My favorite was a lovely little table with three legs on which sat a tiny lamp, but I also had a grand piano, complete with bench, and a full complement of bathroom fixtures of modern design. The kitchen had a refrigerator whose door really opened, and the bedroom vanity had a real mirror about as big as my thumbnail.

I loved that dollhouse, even as I had loved the bookshelf of doll furniture before it. But neither could hold a candle to what I saw last week at F.A.O. Schwartz'.

Blue Jaunt - II

As the love of baseball cuts across all economic levels, so does the love of dollhouses. The difference is that with dollhouses it's quite another game when you are rich.

Only fancy, if you will, an elegant brownstone mansion, with Tiffany lamps and carved oak woodwork and wallpaper with real draperies to match. Or if that isn't to your taste, perhaps a French palace filled with miniature antiques, all in period of course, with crystal chandeliers and mirrors and gilt. If a more modern world is your pleasure, then a Frank Lloyd Wright design with sleek low-backed furniture will fill your daughter's eyes with stars. But the truth is that a pressed cardboard or rolled tin model will do the same, for seldom a child is born that can resist these petite pleasures, regardless of their price.

My dollhouse sat upon a low stool where I could easily reach it, and I used to gather my dolls around me and spend hours introducing one to another. My babydoll was named Susan, and she wore a lacy cap and frilly long christening dress. Her eyes opened and shut, and I believe she may have cried when tilted a certain way, but I never liked my dolls to cry so kept her snugly cuddled in her own wee blanket, or tucked into the doll-sized perambulator I had inherited from my older sister. My father had built me a pint-sized table and two chairs, and Mother had painted them a cheery red. I loved to set my teddybear (named Teddy, of course) on one chair, and my favorite doll in the other, and serve them tiny cups full of water.

My favorite doll was a charming girl named Emily, with what must have been lovely auburn hair when she was new, but by the time I start clearly remembering had become a ratty mop. No matter, I loved her. And she loved me; even now I can say that more positively than of most of the other lovers in my life. Emily patiently smiled and gazed at me with untroubled blue eyes as I wrenched her dress on and off, washed her unwashable face, combed her uncombable tresses, made her climb trees and make mudpies, and occasionally forced her to kiss the teddy bear who was her only serious rival for my heart. Each night, duty would make me see that all my dolls were comfortably bedded down and warmly covered, but love would make me take Emily to slumberland in my bed.

Though the world has grown larger, my interest in small things has not diminished; nor has, in fact, my interest in toys. But there's something sort of silly about a grownup lady playing with dolls, and though I'm very modern I'm not yet liberated enough to feel free to search out a new Emily or another Teddy.

How delightful then that the world has turned in such a way as to give me my excuse for putting together a dollhouse or something very nearly like it. Dungeons & Dragons, that game of fantasy obsession, has given me an opportunity to paint an entire army of miniatures, or actually two armies, good and evil. At 25 millimeter scale, they are as doll-like as anyone could desire, but several times as intricate. Now, of course, I'm casting around for a 25 millimeter scale medieval castle to place them in.

Several miniature companies are offering 25 millimeter scale furniture. No chandeliers nor grand pianos here, but a more rough-hewn world where adventurers might dally. My most recent acquisition is a complete tavern

Blue Jaunt - III

interior with bar, kegs, tables and benches, complete with barkeep and serving wenches, one of whom I may well name Emily just for old times sake. Until I get that scaled-down castle, I keep these on a bookshelf. There's something very satisfying about having things go full circle, you know.

On our last trip to my home town, Mother gave me a group of old photographs, and among them there was me as a seven year old, holding Emily up to the camera. And, you know what? When I saw that photo from so long ago, there was an upwelling of love that brought a lump to my throat, as I looked at my friend and wondered where she could have gone to.

Somewhere I hope that Emily smiles brightly, with a fresh new hairdo and a bright new dress. I hope she sleeps snugly in some little girl's arms in heaven, where surely all good dolls must go. And I hope she finally made her peace with Teddy, so that hand in hand they frolic on the golden streets. When suppertime comes, I hope they dance into an alabaster dollhouse, where they are served milk and honey from a real china teaset.

And I hope--oh, how I hope--that they'll wait for me.

POETRY FROM VERSE CORNER TO VERSE

I never owned a Volkswagon;
I wish I'd learned to fly a kite:
I wish I'd gone to college
finished the book I tried to write.
I wish I'd kissed that sailor;
said all the words I'd like to say,
But especially I'm sorry Mother
Threw my teddy bear away.

I never walked on London Bridge;
I never got my mink.
I never joined a carnival
and I wish I'd learned to wink.
There's lots of things that I regret
Although they say it doesn't pay,
But most of all I'm sorry Mother
Threw my teddy bear away.

-JOYCE KATZ

CHARLENE'S
PLOY
AN OFFER
YOU'RE SURE
TO JUMP AT

When I think about my childhood, I think of the games.

As summer approaches, and the kids on the block take to the streets for catch and other such games, it brings to mind the games of my own youth. Slap, punch, touch football -- all seem to have survived.

But I've noticed lately a lamentable absence of that old favorite of mine, the jump rope. The ropes which we jumped to can no longer be heard in the neighborhood, and I wonder if that venerable pastime has seen its last days.

We would tie one end of the rope to a garage door or try to convince some older sister or parent to be a steady-ender and -- voila! -- quick, inexpensive fun. In the interests of keeping this great art form alive, I'm making all loyal readers of Four Star Extra an offer I'm sure they won't refuse:

Yes, folks, it's the "Greatest Jump Rope Hits" album!

You, too, can own your own copy of these memorable rhymes of yesteryear. Who can forget "Lincoln, Lincoln," or the hauntingly prophetic "First Comes Love"?

And then there's the classic "All, all, all in together girls." Face the challenge of "Teddy Bear, Teddy Bear." Can you still touch the ground, turn around and go upstairs? Hear again the saucy words of "Policeman, Policeman."

Yes, your own golden youth can live again as you listen to these favorites! Remember going "Red Hot Pepper"? Or "Double Dutch"? Who can't feel the urge to chant along!

And to help those of you who may find that a few words or phrases are growing elusive with the passage of time, we're including absolutely free, a written copy of all the words to these absolutely delightful rhymes you'll treasure always.

Act now to take advantage of this limited offer!

-- Charlene Kunkel

GAS LETTERS GIANTS FROM THE LOUD CROWD

(Our lightning-quick publishing schedule has prevented us from receiving many letters of comment on the first issue before this one goes to press, but a few hardy souls fired back their comments rapidly enough to provide us with a letter column. I have been instructed by no less an authority than Joyce Katz that special honor should be heaped upon Gary Deindorfer for sending the very first LoC. All four stars are currently twinkling in your direction, Gary. -- AK)

GARY DEINDORFER reads a revelation in the stars

It is always an honor to get a fanzine that announces that it is being sent to a small, perhaps even exclusive, group of people, and that it is not available for (chuckle) mere lowly "money." (Where do I get ahold of some of that mere lowly stuff?) (I don't think you understand. It isn't that we don't venerate the almighty buck here at Four Star Extra, but that we don't want to be obligated to send anybody anything -- at this time. }

It took me half an hour to get the point, but I finally realized, "Hey, this Four Star Extra is a 'theme' issue! The theme this issue is Automobiles. And -- I get it! -- every issue there will be some kind of 'theme'! Hey, how about that?" Well, it was much enjoyed.

I don't believe your complicated procedure for writing "Fourplay." My mind can't grasp that. No, I have substituted a simpler, more elegant hypothesis. Which is that I think each issue one of you writes "Fourplay," pretending to be all four parties. My guess (from the notorious "internal evidence") is that the first issue's "Fourplay" was written by Ross Chamberlain.

But it had many telling lines, and Ross is to be congratulated. Re "The Jeffersons" and other black sitcoms, it bothers me that black people are invariably portrayed as crude, buffoonish oafs. It would be as though all-white sitcoms portrayed all white people as Archie Bunker types. Oh... that's right, they do. Why not an upper middle class black sitcom to be shown alongside the upper middle class white sitcoms, with the head of the house a computer engineer, the wife a dietician, the son a medical student and the daughter an aspiring actress? But no, all the black sitcoms show people interacting in a way that, if they were white, would make Archie Bunker's family seem as elegant as Cary Grant and Katherine Hepburn.

"Blue Jaunt" I really believe was written by you, Joyce, because it says so in real print, and fanzines don't lie. Gee, Joyce, this is a good piece of writing. You have taken a piece of every day reality, learning to drive, and made of it, if not Art, at least damned good writing. It hadn't occurred to me that driving instructors not only teach people how to drive but attempt to go to motels with them. There are many things that don't occur to me.

Gas Giants - II

Charlene's article was also enjoyable and well-written. It hadn't occurred to me that museums not only present comic art but also attempt to go to motels with it. There are many things that don't occur to me.

But really, your (Arnie's) description of getting lost somewhere in Brooklyn was, for me, the comic masterpiece of this issue. This is superb. I could see you building the hyperbole of being lost in an alternate reality in a way that is inimitably Arnie Katzian, but you outdid yourself this time. It hadn't occurred to me that it is not only possible to live in Brooklyn as long as you have and still get lost in it, but also to go to a motel with it. There are many things that don't occur to me. (Well, you've guessed the secret of "Fourplay," so I guess there's nothing left for me (Ross) to do but start producing covers for Four Star Extra under my own name beginning with the next issue. - AK)

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BILL ROSTER makes a Grand Gesture

I enjoyed Charlene's description of the Museum of Comic Art. I am a member of CAPS (Comic Art Professional Society) here in L.A., whose members include Sergio Aragones, Don Rico, Alfredo Alcalá, Scott Shaw, Bill Stout, Mark Evanier, Roy Thomas and many others. (About 55.) It sounds as though no one is really paying attention to the Museum, just setting it up as a Great Gesture and not giving it much time. Well, we're all busy.

My lady Sharman has written a couple of shorts for Marvel, but is heavy into writing Scooby-do, Clue Club, Flintstones, etc., for H-B. If she wasn't acting she'd be able to do more, but the theater job takes up a lot of time.

::: P.O. Box 3126 Los Angeles, Ca. 90028

JIM MEADOWS is driven to write

It's interesting that Arnie doesn't drive. Well, not terribly interesting; you couldn't get on Davis Susskind with it. But it is interesting, because I don't drive, either. In Brooklyn, it might be an advantage, but living in the suburbs of Chicago it's sort of a pain. I've just graduated from college and am now working on it like mad. I've been studying my "Rules of the Road" like crazy and plan to shave and put on a tie for my trip to the drivers license, where I shall apply for an instruction permit.

I don't know why I never got around to this six years ago in high school. I took driver education. I got perfectly okay scores, got the instruction permit and everything. I even did a good bit of practicing. But... well, I just didn't have that macho desire for wheels at the time. So I got lazy and began putting things off and putting things off... Now it's six years later, and I've already blown a chance at one job because of my lack of wheels.

And I get these incredible Steve Martin double-takes from people when I tell them I can't drive. I feel like an amputee. But I'm sure it's different in Brooklyn. Everything is different in Brooklyn. (Yes, and vive la difference! - AK)

(That's all we have space for this time, due to the vagaries of the layout of Four Star Extra, but we'll try to leave room for the dozens of letters I just know are being written to us even as I type these lines. WAHF this time: Owen Hanner and Harry Andruschak.)

FOURPLAY

(Continued from page 2, still Arnie waxing nostalgic)

stuff we played in my neighborhood, New Hyde Park on Long Island.

For example, there was "Private Eye." First you cruised the local shopping center until you spotted someone whom you could consider a potential shoplifter. As a matter of practicality, this meant anyone who looked as though he or she could not buy the store out of petty cash. Then we'd follow this "suspect" from store to store, tailing him up one aisle and down the next as he plotted his larcenous plots. We figured that our mere presence must have deterred literally dozens of would-be miscreants. Since we never actually caught one of our suspects red-handed, he had to be content with that.

Bill: Of course, it wasn't all "25 Color Cartoons," either. The sole orientation of most of the games favored by my contemporaries was pain. A favorite pastime was playing "Knuckles," a rather pedestrian game that was infinitely enlivened by virtue of what happened to you if you lost; your opponents hacked away at your knuckles with the blunt/sharp edge of a deck of cards. I also recall pink bellies, Indian burns (aka "snakebite") and head held underwater. That's right, S&M fans, childhood shouldn't hurt, but it usually does.

Joyce: And don't discount those pains that come about accidentally. We were big on tree-climbing, and one good fall would be enough to keep a kid limping for awhile. Though when you talk about hurts, you really have to mention winter; it's a wonder none of us killed each other with those icy snowballs.

Charlene: Well, I'm afraid the trees in my neighborhood were too severely pruned by the Parks Department to allow for much climbing, but I was always unhappy that my mother forbade us to climb the telephone poll in front of the house. But I didn't usually play too rough, so the only injury I ever had as a child with any pretensions to seriousness was when my sister closed a car door on my hand. Siblings seem to have a talent for that kind of good stuff. But the true bane of my existence as a child was that old kids' favorite: school. Let me take just the summers, and I'll be a kid again anytime. Summers always lasted for years. In my neighborhood, like most of Queens and Brooklyn, summers meant playing in the streets, radios in the background, and being allowed out again after dinner -- so long as you were in the house when the streetlights came on. Summers were great.

Arnie: Has everyone had his hand slammed in a car door? I have, and now I find that at least one other person in a fanzine with just four people has, too. If the ratio holds, this means that fully 50% of you -- that's 37½ of you on the mailing list -- are wincing in remembered agony and staring with relief at one of your hands even as you read this. For to discuss the slamming of a car door on one's hand is to discuss pain.

Hey, isn't it great that 37½ of you (and two of us) could share this moment of communion? Yeah, that's what I thought, too. And if you're very, very good, I'll tell you about the time I was hit in the head by a bowling ball.

Bill: I'm not sure why, but this reminds me of something my brother Kenny once did as a kid. Out of two brothers and three sisters (all younger), Kenny is the strangest. He's one of the sweetest guys alive, but very strange. He's the King of the Boob Tube Babies. And when he can't take his TV with him, a mammoth AM/FM radio rests on his shoulder as his eyes glaze and his features repose in that return to the real womb, the electronic one.

Fourplay - IV

Anyway, I was just about 18 at the time, and Ken was something like 12. We lived in a two-family house with my grandparents in Queens, and I was sitting downstairs at my grandma's watching the tube with my friend Vito. A first-rate horror flick was being run, "Terror Is a Man," a much-underrated version of "Island of Dr. Moreau." I heard the phone ring upstairs, and my mother answered it.

It was my dad. He'd been all alone at a construction site, and he'd fallen off a high scaffold. It had taken him over a half hour to drag himself to the phone. My uncle was to drive out and get him -- and he had to bring someone with him to drive my father's car home.

"Kenny," my mother called, and my brother's eyes rose verrrry slowly from the hypnotic pull of the latest Machiste, Son of Hercules, epic. "Go get Bill and tell him to find Vito! Your father's hurt, and we need someone who can drive."

As he got up and left the room, his glance never swerved from the tube. He rushed downstairs and was about to check the stoop, when he heard the siren song of my grandparents' TV -- and his mind was emptied of all else. Like a drug addict staggering the gauntlet of a Harlem sidewalk, stomach lurching, he reeled into the room. He spotted both Vito and me. but he saw the TV first.

He said nothing for the first two minutes.

"Hey," he said, finding a seat, "this looks pretty good! What's it called?"

Fifteen minutes later, I heard the sound of feet trampling the stairs, my uncle's voice, and then my mother's. Then Kenny heard, too.

"Oh yeah," he said at the commercial in a cheery conversational tone, "did you hear what happened to dad?"

Charlene: Well, Kenny stories could certainly fill a fanzine on their own, but I think I'll let that temptation pass. Bill's sister's kid, Billy, is next in line to the TV throne, though. How many two-year-olds do you knowwho count the host of "Bowling for Dollars" among their heroes.

Arnie: And speaking of bowling... I was 10 or 11, and the sport of bowling had just swept into our neighborhood like some form of contagion. My father, my mother and even my then eight-year-old brother Ira were ten-pin fanatics -- and so was I.

We were bowling at Hyde Park Lanes, a somewhat declassé establishment which predated the bowling boom. The place was so small, it was necessary for one to walk in front of the seats of the other alleys in order to get to and from one's own. Now, this obviously was nowhere as safe as it could have been, but they only changed the set-up after my little mishap.

I was walking to get a soda when I noticed him. He was hard to miss, since you don't see many 400-lbers, even in a bowling alley. I waited for him to start his approach to the lane before attempting to walk through the space just behind his alley. Unfortunately, I didn't count on him suddenly reversing his approach and stepping backward toward the edge of the lane while whipping his arm into a murderous backswing. Fortunately, my family doctor lived right across from the Hyde Park Lanes.

And, basically, that's why I've been a science fiction fan for 15 years last April.

And now it's time for us kids to put the toy typewriter away. Be with us next issue when our theme will be (dum-de-dum-dum): "I Love a Mystery."