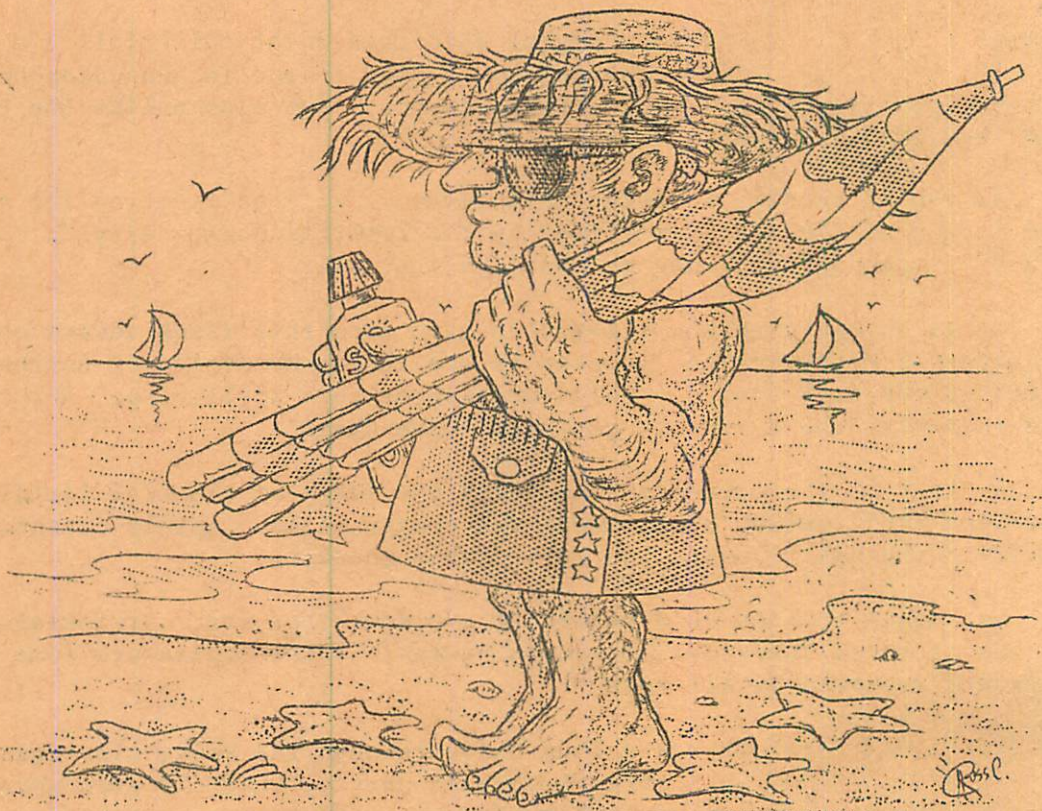
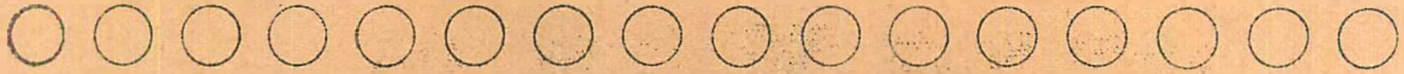


**EXTRA**



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EXTRA



Four Star Extra, Volume 1 Number 5, 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 with joyous frequency, it is sent to the 100 people on our mailing list with our compliments. Reviewers Please Note: Four Star Extra is not available for money. All funds collected as a result of this "Summertime" issue will be spent on ice cream, "spauldeens," and a copy of "In the Summertime" by the immortal Mungo Jerry. Copyright 1978 by Four Star Extra.

Publication Date: August 27, 1978

Next Issue's Theme: Renegade Culture

Cover: Ross Chamberlain



SUMMERTIME

Arnie: Before plunging into this joint editorial, I'd like to ease my troubled conscience. I lied to you in the colophon. Unlike Jimmy Carter, I never promised that I wouldn't lie to you. But also unlike the President, it makes me feel bad when I actually do so.

As you'll recall, I wrote: "All funds... will be spent on ice cream, 'spauldeens,' and a copy of 'In the Summertime' by the immortal Mungo Jerry." Completely untrue. We won't be spending our swag on that stuff at all.

We'll be applying any ill-gotten gain from this issue toward our next visit to Strickland's Mountain Inn, located in the Pocono Mountains of northeastern Pennsylvania. Since we returned from our July vacation at this idyllic spa, the four of us have become obsessed with the desire to get back there again.

A "trip to the mountains" conjures the image of a quaint little cabin, a cheery campfire and exhilarating hikes among the craggy hills. Hardly consonant with our "hedonistic-to-the-hilt" image, you're probably thinking.

You ought to know we'd never let you down that way. Strickland's, which began life as one of those luxurious honeymoon havens, is now a pleasure dome par excellence for decadant twosomes of all ages.

Bill: It was a long drive through the smoky city into the afternoon. Followed by a stretch through Jersey, which is even worse. You travel down mile after mile of clone superhighway and cross erector set bridges, but when you ulti-

## Fourplay - II

mately reach the parking area, everything fades. The day. Your name. Your face. You know only that somehow, some way, you have died. And yes, by God, There is a Heaven!

"There's the heated, indoor pool," was the first thought that popped into my previously emptied brain. "And there, that building -- I know that building!" And though I was on virgin turf, indeed I did know it. Its steep vaulted roof, its knotty pine perfection -- I knew the feel of the textured rug beneath my feet as we walked toward the Registration Area.

Even as the private bus tooled up to our Timberline Chateaux, I ticked off, in my mind, the various types of cabins as we passed them. There, a Skytop Chalet! And over there -- a Colonial Mansion and, nearby, a Colonial Mansionette! Lord, I had been to this place before! In some hidden corner of some obscure racial memory, I mused, I must have visited a similar paradise.

The driver smiled as he carried our bags up to our side-by-side Timberlines, and I wore a strange glazed look as I followed him in. Gods of Earth and Air! To my right, I saw a huge room containing a sunlamp, an immense hydro-spa, a double-size sauna, miles of sinks and closets and... mirrors. Mirrors that would have delighted the Sun-King himself. Walls, ceiling, everything was polished to white light clean; glowing, glinting, sparkling.

A few steps to the left and down into the sunken living room you go. It was all clean, wooden lines, but for the stone around the fireplace. Indirect lighting tilted at odd angles, casting illumination upon the plain paneled walls.

I followed the driver upstairs, and he showed me the controls. But I already knew them, had already flicked them on and off countless times... other times...

I lay on the bed when we were alone, naked, and I looked up at the ceiling. I saw myself, as I knew I would, reflected in yet another mirror, this one abutting a slanting window over which curtains had been drawn. I noticed the bedroom fireplace out of the corner of my eye, and then I closed my eyes and thanked myself for coming.

Arnie: The Timberline Chateau was really my idea of roughing it. I had previously considered "roughing it" to be when you had nothing in the house to drink except soda in cans -- without pop tops. So I felt like a gen-u-ine pioneer, frolicking among the rugs and mirrors and chandeliers. Ah, wilderness!

Charlene: Well, I really felt very adventuresome the couple of times we actually walked to the dining hall instead of calling the courtesy car. I'm sure a good old-fashioned country walk of two or three minutes did much to prepare our appetites for the three, five-course meals per day. Who will ever forget that French toast or the hot, fresh bread. Or -- dare I say it -- the baked apples?

Joyce: I don't think Bill will ever forget the baked apples, that's for certain. As for myself, though, my heart goes out to the tapioca. Quite a lot could be said about Stickland's food -- all of it good.

I was particularly entranced by the lake. I estimate it to be about three acres with a small island at its center and at least ten ducks floating on it. With the willow branches hanging down over the channel between the shore and the island, I didn't know whether to play Jungle Jim or Mississippi River Boat Race as we paddle-boated around. And the ducks didn't seem to mind either game.

(Continued on page 28 )

KATZENJAMMER O O O O

# ICE CREAM BELLS

When summer fries the sidewalks of New York, the sounds of the city grow more boisterous. Car horns trumpet defiance at cabs and busses, portable radios pulse the soul sounds of WBLS, and voices kept at a defensive mumble through months of icy blasts and early sunsets find renewed strength.

I've listened to the sounds of New York summers for most of my 32 years. I've heard "Kill the umpire!" at Ebbetts Field and "Hey, sweetheart, wanna have a party?" on Eighth Avenue. But one sound that's guaranteed to make my heart thump faster is the jingle-jingle-jingle of ice cream bells.

My brother Ira used to say he'd know I was dead when the ice cream truck rolled past, and I didn't bolt down the street after it. This may be an exaggeration, but not a large one. I don't know what you did with the time you now devote to sex before you reached puberty, but I spent many of those hours in hot pursuit of those tinkling bells.

If there is a Hell and I'm sent there, my punishment is waiting. To atone for my sins, I will be condemned to trot behind an ice cream truck for all eternity. The demonic driver of that blood-red vehicle will lead me down endless suburban streets, letting me get just close enough to read the banner proclaiming "Mint Chocolate Chip" as the week's special. But no matter how loudly I shout and how persuasively I wheedle, the truck never pulls over to the curb.

In my neighborhood, ice cream meant "The friendly man who sells Good Humor / the ice cream kids all favor." The company had such a stranglehold on local ice cream business that residents often called all ice cream "Good Humor", much as office workers refer to all dry copies as "xeroxes". While emissaries of rival ice cream companies slunk -- or sped -- past at irregular intervals, sometimes skipping our street entirely, the Good Humor man was dependable. He showed up twice a day, in the afternoon and again after dinner, just like clockwork.

This is not to say that dispensers of "off brand" ice cream were without all merit; it was simply that you couldn't count on them when you absolutely had to have a chocolate cake pop. Nothing is more important to the addict than a reliable connection.

Standing tallest among the ice cream pygmies was American Bar, which believed its blatant appeal to patriotism could compensate for a bland and uninspired line of products. I never met an American Bar driver who looked a day under 70, or who had been in this country for more than two years. Come to think of it, what could be more truly "American" than haggling over a nickle with someone just off the boat from Europe?

ARNIE KATZ O O O O O O O O

American Bar's trucks may have been as stainlessly white as Good Humor's but no one would ever accuse their drivers of friendliness. If the Good Humor man was like a favorite uncle, then the American Bar representative was a crotchety grandfather. A kid had to deal carefully with one of these stiff-backed old gaffers, lest the crusty patriarch refuse to fill the order.

The fanciest trucks, if not the finest ice cream belonged to Bungalow Bar. Each was crowned by a red shingle roof which made the vehicle resemble a Howard Johnson's on wheels. Truthfully, I know little about Bungalow Bar. They usually drove past so fast that even I wasn't quick enough to flag one down unaided.

No, one did not lightly set one's sights on a Bungalow Bar bar. Such a prize could not be acquired easily, at least where I lived. First reconnaissance troops -- kids mounted on Schwinn bicycles -- fanned out through the neighborhood to spot a truck. Once we located this rara avis, a not inconsiderable feat in itself, a trained network of kids swung into action. Using techniques developed for big game hunting in Africa, they skillfully guided the precious truck in the desired direction.

The "beaters" were extremely subtle. A Bungalow Bar driver whizzing along a main drag at 10 miles per hour over the speed limit would be brought up short by a veritable mob of children blocking the street. With visions of a sales bonanza dancing in his head, the driver would screech across two lanes of traffic to reach the curb. Unfortunately, by the time the Bungalow Bar man reached the back of the truck, where the business was conducted, the crowd had shrunk to a few toddlers with only enough money for a one-stick ice pop. Before the vendor could get downhearted, however, he was directed to look down a sidestreet where an even larger throng awaited his coming.

Or, at least, that's the way we planned it. Mostly, the Bungalow Bar truck whizzed past at full throttle, its sonic booms leaving a trail of broken windows and frustrated youngsters in its wake. Even as a little kid, I wondered how Bungalow Bar made any money this way. Perhaps they did a thriving business among the founders of today's jogging cult, physical fitness buffs willing and able to buy their ice cream on the run.

But it was Morty the Good Humor man whom I knew best. He was a short, chubby fellow with a jolly smile that must have warmed the hearts of the corporate image-makers back at the company's New Jersey headquarters. I can't remember Morty when he wasn't smiling. (Of course, I can't remember when his route didn't include the Sperry Gyroscope plant, where several thousand ice cream freakos would stand on hour-long lines to buy a half-dozen pops at a time. This hardly hurt his disposition.)

Morty must have been in his early forties when he first began serving our area, and he was a constant through most of my youth. Like a harbinger of spring, he appeared with the first sunny day -- and vanished just as abruptly in the chilly afternoons of autumn. He was one of those people who hardly seem to change from year to year, though I suppose the pepper in his hair turned to salt over the two decades I bought ice cream from him. The younger kids in New Hyde Park believed Morty had sold ice cream to Teddy Roosevelt, an assertion he would neither confirm nor deny.

Morty's all-consuming hobby was perfect for someone in his line of work; he collected coins. No one will ever know how many numismatic treasures he culled from the endless stream of pennies, nickels, dimes and quarters which flowed through his coin changer.

When the coin collecting bug bit New Hyde Park in the early 1960's, Morty's already considerable prestige hit a new high. Many of my friends had outlandish dreams in which

the ice cream vendor let them go through his coin horde -- after Morty had creamed off the real gems. (We were practical dreamers.)

What Morty actually did was sell his classier duplicates to us right along with our daily ration of ice cream. For a time, this sideline threatened to eclipse the supposed raison d'etre for the refrigerated truck. His coin prices were so enticing that many a child blew his humorette money on one of Morty's numismatic specials.

Not me, though. I knew what was important -- ice cream. So I spent my summer days going in and out of the neighborhood banks, ceaselessly changing and rechanging coin rolls. This kept my coin collection growing nicely, while leaving my ice cream money intact.

It was as a result of coin collecting that another unsuspected side of our beloved ice cream man was revealed to me. Any time a kid found what looked like a good coin, the first thing he did was bring it to Morty for an evaluation. Sometimes, the genial vendor would even make an offer right on the spot.

It came to pass that my best friend Barry found a genuine oddball item. It looked something like a Barber dime, except that where it should have read "United States of America," it read "United States of Fluchswanger". Unable to find the dime in the coin catalogue, Barry took it to Morty.

"This appears to be a coin from the Isle of Fluchswanger," the ice cream man said with a heavy sigh.

"The Isle of Fluchswanger!" Barry gasped. He had recently begun reading Amazing Stories, and the lurid yarns had enflamed his native gullibility to mammoth proportions. "I never heard of that."

"It's gone now," Morty explained. "Sunk beneath the waves."

"Were there people?" Barry looked up at Morty expectantly, his jaw hanging slack in wonderment.

"I'll say there were," Morty replied. He then told Barry the sad tale of the Isle of Fluchswanger, a super-scientific civilization in the mid-Atlantic which was innundated by watery death. The only thing he left out were the heroes.

(The truth, at least as I pieced it together years later, was that the coin was evidently a proof struck by a designer in the late 19th or early 20th century. Since he couldn't put "United States of America" on a coin he had struck himself, he used his own name instead.)

The story of the Isle of Fluchswanger, coming as it did from the unimpeachable source of the local Good Humor man, was instantly accepted as gospel by Barry. He became a voracious reader of science fiction and fantasy as he sought for additional data about the now-extinct race of Fluchswangerians. Perhaps he eventually vanished into the abyss of "occult science" in his search for ultimate knowledge.

Me, I pretty much stuck to ice cream and today I am a happier, if plumper, man for it.

-- Arnie Katz

P L O Y O O O O O O O O O O O

# BOOB TUBE SUMMER

It doesn't seem to be any secret that television is worse than ever. Viewing generally is down about 5%, I understand, and the percentage of shows that survive from season to season is abysmal. In the networks' desperate attempts to grab viewer interest, one staple of former years that apparently is being phased out is the "summer replacement" show. For many years, the way of trying out new shows that the networks were uncertain about placing on the regular schedule, summer shows were at worst a respite from repeats that begin increasingly early, and at best could be a small gem. Now, it seems, the networks prefer to mix in limited series (Spiderman, for instance) throughout the season, and to spend the summer reshuffling their schedules from week to week in an effort to build audiences for established shows. Summer replacements have become few and far between.

One of the very few to appear this summer was Rob Reiner's "Free Country". At least, this was different and, hallelujah, not jiggle television. Women just didn't seem to jiggle all that much in the early 1900's, the setting of this comedy. A story of young immigrants, introduced each week by the now 90-year-old protagonist, it was certainly an original concept. Too bad it wasn't funny, too. Although definitely not deserving of the bottom-of-the-heap ratings it garnered, it was heavily flawed. Reiner, for example, hasn't acquired the skills at this point to successfully portray a 90-year-old man. He came off simply as a young man made up to look about 60. But the most serious problem is that the body of the show too often just wasn't funny. One had to suspect that it was a case where total creative control (which Reiner apparently had) was too much too soon. A show which had no really basic problems, "Free Country" may just have needed someone to say, "hey, that's not working." Unfortunately, it doesn't look like it will get a chance to work out its problems.

However, the showing of pilots that haven't been sold is one summer staple which is still with us. A result of an understandable desire on the part of the networks to regain at least part of their investment in these rejects, the broadcasting of programs "not on this year's schedule" can sometimes be a pleasant surprise. Few, alas, have shown much promise this year, but perhaps that's just as well -- saves one thinking about what might have been, anyway. One which was fairly good was "I'm Just Wild About Harry." Once you get past that dreadful title, the show itself, which starred Efrem Zimbalist, Jr., dealt in a more-mature-than-usual way with a May-December romance. It certainly was head and shoulders above the "All's Fair" of a few seasons ago, although admittedly almost anything would be (whatever made them think Bernadette Peters looked 21, anyway?) However, since it's already been done badly and the show's been cancelled, I suppose one can't expect TV executives to believe that it could be successful if done well.

As a matter of fact, viewing of unsold pilots can be a real education in how American

CHARLENE KUNKEL O O O O

television executives think. One species of these pilots that I tend to watch for is American adaptations of British hits. Viewing these programs, particularly, has led me to a few conclusions. I believe that American television, due partly to the trend away from adult comedies and back to the banal comedic ideas of the late sixties, and partly to the ever-present least-common-denominator theory, has decided that in the field of adaptations their model should not be "All in the Family", but "Beacon Hill". CBS' ill-fated version of the excellent "Upstairs/Downstairs" was lavishly done, with expensive sets and even fine actors and actresses in the lead roles. It was also awful. The problem was not the production values of the performances, and obviously not the original concept. It was the execution of the concept. They made dumb mistakes. They seemed to have no sense of what made U/D work. It was just all wrong.

Well, American producers seem to have learned nothing from this. It's almost as if they believe the success of "All in the Family" (the Americanized version of "Till Death Us Do Part") was the freak, and the failure of "Beacon Hill" an unexplained aberration on the part of the public. Adult treatment of adult themes is so foreign to them that they can't recognize it when they see it -- in short, they've forgotten what real life is all about. And they keep proving it.

Take, for example, "Rock Follies". A big hit in England, it has "inspired" countless shows here. Sadly, the extent of this inspiration has been producers grabbing the "three girls trying to make it in show business" theme, and turning it into jiggle television -- "Sugar Time", for example. But there was an actual adaptation of "Rock Follies" done with a good amount of prior publicity. Suddenly, the publicity stopped. Anyone who saw the pilot can tell you why.

Now, I didn't expect "Rock Rainbow" to be as realistic as the original, since after all sex and drugs are certainly prominent adjuncts to the rock world and are bound to figure in any accurate account of rock musicians on the road, and American television is obviously not up to dealing with them realistically. But I thought that with possibly being just a bit more daring than usual and taking care of the rest with inuendo -- a specialty of American TV -- they might be able to get by. But I didn't think that they'd just water down everything to fit their watered down view of drugs and sex. It's hard to say what was worst. The cast certainly was in the running for that honor, though.

The only competent performance was delivered by old pro Robert Alda, in a brief appearance that was part of a major change from the original version. In "Rock Follies", the three women who later form "The Little Ladies" meet while all are appearing in a very bad play. "Rock Rainbow" has the leads signed to be a back-up group to a one-time big star who is about to make a Vegas comeback. Unfortunately, the star is a lush who is now incapable of singing a single note. Alda was excellent in the part, but the role was certainly peripheral to the main action and could hardly save the entire show. And it needed saving.

Rula Lenska, Charlotte Cornwall and Julie Covington, as Q, Anna and Dee in Rock Follies, were all accomplished actresses and singers, and frankly, even if they all hadn't been excellent, Covington's incredible voice could have carried quite a bit of the show alone. But it never had to -- the cast was uniformly excellent. In Rock Rainbow, they certainly could have used a powerhouse voice like hers to give the program some quality. The leads not only could not sing, they couldn't act, either. You'd think that they'd at least cast performers with talent in one of the fields, but they must have scoured Hollywood to discover three such total incompetents.

(Continued on page 16)



GAS GIANTS O O O O O O O O O O

LETTERS FROM

THE LOUD CROWD

Childhood is a game to HARRY WARNER

I was very happy to find you back publishing fanzines, particularly the kind you can't hardly get any more, the ones which contain some material which is not about feminism or Anita Bryant. The best way for me to respond to your second issue would consist of sending you several long-ago issues of Horizons in which I wrote lots of pages on the themes which are prominent in this issue (or rather, on some of the topics which are outgrowths of its theme), but I can't find the spare copies.

For instance, I remember doing one long article on the games I played when I was in my first childhood. In my smallish town, they were different from some of those you (Charlene Kunkel) describe, and I even invented one. The corner store had a sloping patch of concrete, perhaps 10 ft. by 15 ft. at its front, neatly marked into rectangles in the manner of sidewalks. I figured out how to play a sort of netless, racquetless tennis, using the cracks in the sidewalk as boundary lines and slapping the tennis ball with the flat of the hand. Either singles or doubles could be played, and it was so fast that j'ai l'ai seemed stodgy by comparison. There were added thrills through the fact that the court was bounded by a busy street, a prickly hedge, a plate glass window and a small cliff where the intersecting street went downhill. This game became enormously popular for a year or two, even attracting some adults.

(I invented a couple of street games as a kid, too. Both of mine involved use of a basketball-size spheroid instead of a baseball or tennis ball. The most popular involved a variant of baseball, in which the pitcher served it up on one bounce. Not only did this permit homeowners with large front picture windows along Patton Boulevard to sleep better at night, but it was a hell of a lot easier for me to play, what with my terrible vision. Necessity is the mother of invention, I guess. -- Arnie)

As you might imagine, I can't compare notes on baseball card collecting, because they weren't generally available when I was growing up. Sometimes I feel cheated when I think of things today's kids can do that I couldn't, like watching television, collecting baseball cards, reading comic books (they were just coming in when I was in my teens, I suppose), playing little league baseball and so on. The only way I can cheer up is to look at the neighborhood's small children and chuckle at the thought of how cheated they're going to feel several decades in the future when they watch the children of the early 21st century enjoying home computers and video tape recorders and Martian soil kits and so on.

Incidentally, although my boyhood came between the great eras of baseball cards, there were various types of candy that came accompanied by cards. Some of them showed wild animals, famous Indians and such things. There were also a few lines that came with magic cards which were blank. You moistened the paper that came with them and rubbed the surface to get the picture. My father was bookkeeper for a wholesale candy firm. He didn't have access to freebies from the stockroom as all the other kids thought he did, but occasionally a salesman would give him a set of those cards for me.

({Is there anything better than getting something everyone else wants -- and getting it free? My dad's company did some work for Topps and, as a result, I sometimes get a whole shoe box full of freshly minted baseball cards on the cuff. But that was nothing to what my friend Roger did. One year, a collating era omitted four cards from the year's final series. The quartet of pasteboards didn't feature anyone famous, you understand, but when you've collected about 500 different players already, those final four can loom awfully large. After spending several dollars in a vain attempt to complete the set, Roger took the bull by the horns and wrote directly to the manufacturer. He poured his heart and soul into that letter, telling how he had sacrificed his allowance for years at the altar of the Topps Chewing Gum Company. He must've pushed the right buttons, because Topps immediately sent him the missing four cards. -- Arnie})

::: 423 Summit Ave., Hagerstown, Md. 21740

TARAL WAYNE MACDONALD tells war stories

As a child, I had quite a military interest. Not that I ever wanted to go into the army and be a dogface or a leatherneck or some other species of officer fodder. I just liked to see great masses of people maneuvering around to kill each other. I fell in love with the exquisite technology of lethal weaponry. Isn't even a Pkw 4 tank a work of art? What Dali or scientific theory demonstrates more craft than a Spitfire?

I hadn't the best or biggest collection of toy soldiers, but I did my darnedest. I had an armada of tanks, a bevy of cannon, shelves-full of model fighters and bombers and, of course, enough men of various types to overrun a banana republic.

My favorite stratagem was to fortify a likely bit of real estate and, after dividing my forces, try to take it if I could. In time, setting up became most of the fun and, as I grew more sophisticated, my set-ups grew too complex to complete in a single afternoon. Eventually, I liquidated my army. It was too toyish, and it was rare that more than a handful of men matched in size, color or uniform. Out it went, even the good stuff. And now I regret it.

More recently, my interest in toy soldiers has revived. I only collect the best in toy soldiers, naturally, and pass up the usual 98¢ package of U.N. troops cast in ludicrous poses with poorly sculpted faces. There is a line of excellent plastic soldiers made by Airfix that satisfies my adult tastes nicely. The sculpting is some of the best I've ever seen, and the ratio of useful -- that is to say firing or otherwise murderous -- soldiers to useless duds marching or running is quite good. (It's about 50/50 in some sets and much better in others.) So far, I have about two-thirds of the available sets and, at \$2.50 the box, I will be getting the remaining sets as soon as I can.

({Our penchant is for 25mm lead fantasy figures around here. Joyce has a collection of 150 she's painted herself which we use in conjunction with our Dungeons and Dragons campaign. -- Arnie})

::: 415 Willowdale Ave., Apt 1812, Willowdale, Ontario

## Gas Giants - III

The once-macho DAVE HULL writes

My childhood was notable -- to me, anyway -- for what will probably turn out to be my most flagrant display of macho. At the time I lived in Ottawa, and it was the middle of the winter. Some of my friends were getting their jollies by putting their hands on our metal screen door -- and then peeling them off after they became frozen.

Harmless. So in an effort to show off and to prove my manliness -- I was seven -- I went up to the door and, yes, carefully applied my tongue to the freezing surface. The trouble didn't start until I tried to get it off...

Fifteen minutes and one tongue later, I was rescued. Not only did I pledge to give up my macho ways, but I didn't talk for awhile, either.

::: Box 471, Owen Sound, Ontario N4K 5D7 Canada

GARY DEINDORFER recalls some old bullshit -- and invents some, too

I had an idyllic childhood growing up in the urban concrete caverns of West Philadelphia. Well do I remember on sweltering summer days how we kids used to wait eagerly for the tinkling bells of the Bullshit Wagon. The bell would tinkle and we would yell, "The Bullshit Wagon, the Bullshit Wagon!" We would shell out our nickels for cups of steaming bullshit... refreshing treat on a muggy day.

We used to hang around the corner undertaker's because old Mr. Bunghole, the head mortician, used to let us kiddies watch him and his assistants prepare the corpses for burial. If we were really good, he'd give us fingers and toes to munch on. Yum yum. Afterwards, all the kids agreed they wanted to be undertakers when they grew up. Except for me. I said, "Not me."

"What do you want to be, then?" my little friends asked.

"I want to operate a meat grinder in a slaughterhouse," I said.

(←That's a lofty ambition, indeed. On what grounds did you aspire to it? Well, if you didn't decide to chuck the whole thing, say hello to Rocky for us. - Arnie→)

::: 447 Bellevue Ave., Trenton, N.J. 08618

OWEN HANNER, the spy who loved us, writes

I love a mystery, too. I love Four Star Extra more, though.

When I was younger, I had a toy spy set that was really neat. It was a briefcase that had a rifle and periscope inside, each in its own special compartment. It looked like a plain black briefcase from the outside, but that was just to fool the "enemy."

There was even a way you could load the gun while it was still inside the case. By pushing a secret button on the outside of the case, the gun could be fired while it was still in its compartment. Oh, I used to love to shoot that sucker!

The whole set was a real kick. I don't know what happened to it; probably lost in one of my multitudinous moves in the last 10 years. I know I haven't seen one like it anywhere since.

I'm not sure, but a set like that might be one of the things which could inspire really first-rate criminals, such as Charlene mentioned in "Fourplay." It had to do with

Gas Giants - IV

secret agent stuff -- and we all know that secret agents are Very Good People Unless they're from the Other Side, in which case secret agents are Evil and Nasty and not fit to spit on. Now, I had that kit and turned out a good guy, but that might just be me. The set may also have inspired a bunch of very classy hoods and muggers. You never know.

(Good point there, Owen. Remember, for every kid who learned to be a crime-stopper from his Dick Tracy Fingerprint kit, another little squirt learned the advisability of wearing gloves during a caper. - Arnie)

::: 3509 Woodland Circle South, Island Lake, Ill. 60042

Danger is JIM MEADOWS' business

The name of Nick Danger cropped up more than once in the joint editorial (of Four Star Extra #3), and it's interesting to note what an enduring character he has been. Not just Danger himself, but the whole genre of the hardboiled detective (as Arnie probably knows from the way he stuck to that subject in his two articles.)

Phil Austin of the Firesign Theatre certainly hasn't forgotten, either. He was the voice of Nick Danger and probably had a lot to do with that album's script. Later on, when he solo'd away from the Firesign Theatre with "Roller Maidens from Outer Space," he invented T.V. detective Dick Private, private dick, who scurried across the channels trying to find Austin's Lucky and Ricky and Ozzie and Harriet counterparts. Same voice, same language tricks. Then, when Austin and David Ossman wrote "In the Next World, You're on Your Own," the tone was different, but not entirely off the track. With washed-up cop Randall Coolzip and the unnamed bittersweet narrator, you could still hear Austin's fascination coming through. I read "The Day Case" with Phil Austin's voice going through my head. (Like a runaway freight train, howling in the seething night, highballing down the mainline to nowhere? - Arnie)

The nice thing about Peter Wimsey is that he's so clean. Dorothy L. Sayers was an educated Christian woman, after all. We have some of her religious writing and her translation of "Dante's Inferno" lying around the house, along with just about all the Wimsey material. No wonder the Lord was such a nice guy.

::: 31 Apple Court, Park Forest, Ill. 60466

We also heard from: Lee Hoffman, Roy Tackett, Pam Janisch, Victoria Vayne, Brian Earl Brown, Rick Stoker, Mike Glicksohn, Tim Marion, and Harry Andrushak. Many of these letters arrived just a little too late to cram into this issue, and some will undoubtedly see print in Four Star Extra #6

Along with the dozens of additional letters you're going to send us.

-- Arnie Katz

# BLUE JAUNTOOOOOOOO ROUGHING IT

A low murmur of conversation floated toward me from the other diners at Richoux' of London. The waitress returned, looking like Rose from Upstairs-Downstairs, bearing a frosty drink adorned with oranges and cherries. She set the glass down on the marble table top before me, and slipped silently away. I leaned back against the leather upholstery, listening idly to the tinkle of cutlery and crystal in the room. As I sipped my gin daisy, I gazed out the windows at the traffic scurrying around the Citicorp Center. It was Friday afternoon, and everyone was rushing from the City to...somewhere. I snuggled deeper into the cushions, and nibbled experimentally on a slice of gin-marinated orange, as I watched a couple trudge into view, packs strapped to their backs, and wearing hiking shoes. "Off to the mountains," I mused. Gin daisies are good for making one muse. I watched them pass by, staunchly bearing their burdens, pride and anticipation smeared over their faces like jam, heading west. Heading toward the sunset. I stirred my drink, and thought back...

My family got into camping when I was just entering my teens. I have no idea what prompted this bizarre aberration from their previous comfort-loving stance, but it must have been a powerful force. From that first time on, every weekend would see us piling the Packard full of supplies and heading for some portion or other of the bucolic Missouri countryside.

Not that we really had all that many supplies when we started, and this seems to be the rule with all campers. The first time we went camping, we rolled up in blankets on the ground and slept as close to our open fire as we could get. Mother cooked us our dinner in an old iron skillet she placed right in the hot coals, leaning over the cookfire like some ancestral pioneer woman on the trail. I believe the only other supplies we had were a salt shaker, some matches, a pound of lard, cornmeal, and a knife for cleaning the fish.

My father never slept a wink, didn't even lie down. All night he sat by the fire, throwing on logs each time the blaze died down, keeping his ear tuned to the hoots and howls of the wildlife, watching the car, and maintaining a constant alert against "roughnecks and drunks who could cut your throat while you're sleeping."

I felt certain that this experience would have been enough for them, and that we'd never go again. But evidently it had touched some primal chord within them and that was only the beginning. Every Saturday morning between April and October from that point on we'd load the car with the equipment which we gradually accumulated and head for the hills.

Our first purchase was a huge aluminum ice-box into which we'd pack a 10 pound block from the local iceplant and all our perishables. After that, there were army surplus folding cots for each of us. One weekend of trying to get comfortable on a cot, and it was back to the sporting goods store for inflatable air mattresses all around. Then it

JOYCE KATZ OOOOOOOO

was a nice three-burner-Coleman stove so my mother wouldn't have to bend over a campfire anymore.

When we'd go camping, we'd see other families sitting down to their dinners of hot-dogs and canned beans, or cold cuts and potatoe chips. Not us. My mother sat her family down to potroast with potatoes and carrots, or fried chicken, or porkchops, or steak, or meatloaf. A proud southern woman, no amount of hardship was enough reason not to serve a good home-cooked meal. For breakfast there'd be bacon or ham and eggs and oatmeal and homemade biscuits fried cowboy style, with butter and jam and honey. We'd stand shivering in our flannels close to the fire, stamping our feet as the cool morning mist rose off the river, holding steaming mugs of coffee so strong it'd make your hair curl. When the sun was fully up and the dishes were washed and stowed away, we'd be off to wander freely around the area. While Mother played out her pioneering fantasies, my daddy would herd the cars into a circle to form a fortress against invaders.

I guess we camped beside every waterhole of any description in Southeast Missouri. The worst trip we ever took was fishing on Black River just above Wappappello Lake. The "camp grounds" were called that only out of courtesy and were really nothing but a muddy field in which you could park your car, and a couple of outhouses which defied polite description. But, the fish were biting and the weather was warm. All day we traipsed up and down the muddy river bank, every one of us catching our limits of crappie, bass, catfish, wall-eyed pike, and sun perch. By evening we were tired and filthy, but there was no place to wash up, so my mother made a rather weary supper, and we all squatted on our heels trying to stay out of the dirt to eat our fish and hushpuppies. Then, as the sun set, the mosquitoes came. We sprayed, and made the fire burn smokey, and covered ourselves with 6-12, then ended by simply putting our arms over our faces and trying to endure. After an endless, comfortless night we finally left for home early the next day, promising never to return.

Several times we camped at Chaonia, which was sort of splendid in a scary kind of way. Chaonia had been a small town before a WPA project dammed Black River to form the lake. The rising waters killed the town, and now all that's left are ghostly chimneys rising out of the marshy land around the lake, concrete steps leading to nowhere, subterranean chambers that had been basements and storm cellars, and stone-rimmed wells long contaminated by muddy lake waters. The woods and marsh grasses reclaimed the kitchen gardens and streets alike, and wildlife roams unthreatened where once a different kind of life abounded.

That night, sitting around the campfire, we heard screams of some big cat moving through the woods. That, an owl, and the fish flopping in the water were the only sounds. We told ghost stories, and made up legends about the long-ago residents of Chaonia, and watched the mists come off the water to produce a low-hanging fog that turned the grass and trees to grey.

But our favorite place, the one we always went back to, was Big Springs. A national park about 50 miles west of Poplar Bluff, it's the largest spring in the world. It bubbles up from under a mountain and creates a crystal-clear icy stream which then feeds into Current River. (Once I climbed straight up the face of the mountain over the spring, while my mother stood at the base wringing her hands. It was a tough climb on the way up, but then I found I couldn't get back down, and had to go the long way around, down the ridge of the hill.)

Having passed through our survive-off-the-land-with-Bowie-knife-and-wits phase of camping, my family came to enjoy more and more comforts with their trips. Since Big

Springs' campground enjoyed running water (even showers!), electric lights, pre-cut firewood for our use, and the Rangers' protection, it made it possible to play out our primitive fantasies in almost-civilized splendor. (Most campers soon realize that they don't really want to go all the way back to barbarism; what they really would like is a luxury resort where they can stay for free, as indicated by the continuing acquisition of more and more elaborate devices by which to introduce the conveniences of civilization to a wilderness setting.)

I was always allowed to take one of my friends with us on our trips, and it was usually Mary Hedges. She and I especially enjoyed Big Springs because, along with the aforementioned conveniences, the park also had a lodge with a real juke box and tiny dance floor. Mary and I would traipse around the hills and the park's hiking trails, and not coincidentally check the other campsites to see if there were any cute guys (sometimes we got lucky.) Then we'd go to the lodge and stuff nickles into the juke box and drink cokes and dance with each other. In the evenings when it got too late to run around the park and too cool to swim in the icy water, we'd sit on the porch of the lodge and watch the stars (which seemed very near) and talk about the Great Mysteries of Life ("I wonder where Bill is tonight", "I wonder if Jim will call me tomorrow"... important stuff.) Eventually Mother would get nervous about us being out of sight and call us back. Then we'd get on our 'jammies and settle down in a nest of blankets where we'd whisper and giggle until we fell asleep.

One night we were sitting around the fire with Mother and Daddy. (He never did quit sitting up all night, by the way. He'd guard the camp, sitting at the picnic table, getting up to feed the fire as needed. Then after breakfast he'd spend the daylight hours lying on his cot, resting up for the next exciting night of protecting his brood.) "Hey, Mary" he said to my friend, "did you notice when they turned the water off last night?"

"Sure," he went on, after the exchanges of 'what're you talking about', and 'you're putting me on', "the spring has been going dry for years now, but no one wants to give up being the biggest in the world. So, the park commission has piped in water to the spring, to keep it flowing. Thing is, because of the drought, they have to turn it off every night to save water."

"Yeah," I chimed in. "After they turn the lights off, they cut off the spring, and the river bed goes completely dry. You can walk right across it."

"And then they turn it back on in the morning, just before dawn, so no one will know," added Mother, reinforcing the tale.

Well, Mary bought it. All that evening she could talk of little else but this giant hoax the National Park Service was playing on the world for the benefit of our own home state. She kept hoping they never learned of the ruse at that other spring down in Florida that also claimed to be the world's largest.

That night Mary was loathe to go to bed, and even when we were finally tucked into the covers, tried bravely to stay awake to witness the moment when the spring was turned off. She made a good effort at it, but finally the night and the blankets won. The next morning when she awoke, my dad asked, "Well, did you see?" Mary sadly reported that she had fallen asleep and missed the phenomena. "Well, I saw it," lied my daddy through his false teeth. "Just after midnight the Ranger came around and turned it off. Then he turned it back on at about 4:30 this morning."

For the rest of the day, Mary had nothing else on her mind, and searched dilligently around the base of the mountain at the mouth of the spring for the cut-off switch. When we went home on Sunday night, she rushed into her house, eager to tell her family the secret she had learned.

They laughed at her so hard for believing our tall tale that she didn't speak to me for half the next week.

\*

"Hi, honey," said Arnie, as he slid into the booth beside me. "Been waiting long?" An exchange of kisses and other pleasantries, and the parlor-maid waitress came back for our orders.

As I cozied up to Arnie, I tried to tell him how my thoughts had been running. "You know, baby, maybe we should go camping up in the mountains."

"I thought we already had," he said over the rim of his glass. "Strickland's is as rough as I want it to get."

Very well pleased, I ate the cherry from his drink, and settled down for my supper of quiche lorraine.

-- Joyce Katz

P L O Y O O O O O O O O O O O O O O

The music was another fiasco. Rock Follies used almost entirely excellent originals which easily stood on their own merits, as well as reflecting the action. This disaster chose not to use the same songs, and substituted dreadful pap. The title word "Rock" notwithstanding, they apparently wanted to keep the music middle of the road and easily recognizable to middle-class America, for instance substituting "With a Little Help From My Friends" for the less generally known "Blueberry Hill" when a rock classic was called for.

But the most amazing thing was the way they just seemed to miss the point. Adapting a successful script, they stripped the show of its guts and left a travesty. It was obvious that money had been spent; they had an excellent example to follow; and they did everything wrong. I noticed that the writer of the scripts and the lyrics for "Rock Follies", Howard Schuman, did not have his name listed anywhere in the "Rock Rainbow" credits. Perhaps he demanded that his name be removed. And, oh yes, Howard Schuman was born and bred in Brooklyn.

It was much the same story with "Snavelly Arms", a pilot based upon the British hit "Fawlty Towers". Although the leads were the talented Betty White and Harvey Korman, and the script was an adaptation of an original "Fawlty Towers" story, it was very bad. Once again, they just didn't seem to know what they were doing. It's amazing how "adapt" has come to mean "take out all the good stuff".

I can't believe this is the best we can do. What I do believe is that American tv has become so insular and cowardly that they stick to the same tired hacks to produce the same bland products week after week. My only hope is that video cassettes will truly revolutionize the industry and that tv will start to take more chances, even if only by putting on a quality show you can tape at 3 a.m. while dishing up the same garbage in prime time. At least we should be able to buy cassettes or video discs produced for limited audiences. It's pretty sad that that's the best we can hope for, but I'm saving for my Betamax, and praying that they'll finally install the cable in Queens.

-- Charlene Kunkel



POWER SQUARE O O O O

# LAND OF THE LOST

You take the "A" train all the way the hell out to Broad Channel, where the station is a concrete pillbox squatting in the wet sand at high tide. In the summer, the unhealthy looking water is dotted with row boats, men fishing for nothing in particular, and catching sea robins. Nowadays there are quite a few yachts to be seen, slipping languidly back to Sheepshead Bay around twilight. And when that orange sun, burning furiously through a filter of poisonous haze, drops down around the horizon, it lights up these garbage strewn waters and reflects off the oily surface in a sort of cut-rate aurora borealis.

While you wait for the "Rockaway Park" train -- a long uneventful wait, punctuated by the sounds of transistor radiós slightly larger than grandfather clocks -- you watch the watercolor sky. A 747, on its way to Kennedy Airport, is too heavy to land. So it swoops out over Jamaica Bay and noiselessly jettisons its emergency fuel supply, before turning around and returning inland. When I was a kid, my dad and uncle used to take me on the big fishing boats that left daily from these waters. Docked at Canarsie, boats like the Tambo would take out parties of twenty fisherfolk at so much per head, for a day of deep sea fluke fishing. And at night, you could see the small powerboats, trolling through the darkness, flashlight beam stabbing into the black waters, casting for bluefish.

In Queens, when someone tells you they are going to "the beach", they mean Rockaway, an area broken up into two smaller sections known as "Rockaway Park" and "Far Rockaway". Rockaway Park, the Beach 116th Street area, offers a boardwalk, a beach, and a fairly heavy surf -- with the famous Playland amusement park only blocks away. Far Rockaway, on the other hand, consists of mile upon mile of near desolate beaches, high grass and few waves. Ideal for collecting sea shells, or for simply getting away from the more congested shoreline areas. I once came upon an auto graveyard where, up on a sandy plateau, surrounded by reeds and cattails, I watched a Thunderbird that had come to die being buffeted by the harsh salt winds. The vultures had already been and gone, taking the transmission, tires, seats, windshield wipers, steering wheel, and breaking all the glass. And as its bones lay bleaching in the sun, the sand began to claim it, covering it over as it had already done to the skeletons of a much-abused Dodge and a half-buried Volkswagen.

You hear many stories of these beaches from the locals, mostly summer people, who leave their city dwellings in June and migrate to places like Breezy Point and Roxbury. Terrible stories, of fugitives from the law and from life, who had come to live on these desolate sands, and had become affected by the isolation, by the environment, by the very feel of the place. Madmen whose crimes were so loathesome that they hardly seemed the work of a human being at all. Sometimes, near evening, glowing white shapes could be seen, moving slowly along the shore, or dragging through the interior. And in the moonlight, low moaning sounds often carried in from the sea, burbling up from the inky depths, longing for release -- or, perhaps, for company? It must be lonely out there, I used to think, for them to call so.

BILL KUNKEL O O O O O O O O

## Power Square — II

My tale begins in July of 1969, on a warm evening at one of my old neighborhood parks. Business could not have been worse that summer. New York was in the grip of a brutal marijuana drought, and it had become a challenge merely for my partner and me to keep ourselves stocked. With our capital fast depleting, we had made a decision to invest in lysergic acid, which was beginning its biggest popularity surge in history at about that time. Our customers had evinced no particular sense of aesthetics with regard to their choice of drugs, and certainly any substance capable of reducing the user to a catatonic stupor would find a ready market among them. So we decided to go with acid -- but even that required at least a one week wait. It was, therefore, with no little relief that I watched Peter B., our numero uno connection, pull unexpectedly up to the curb and smile broadly at us from the interior of his green Carmen Ghia.

"How's it goin'?" he drawled, in his slow, whining voice, grinning like a madman. This wide, toothy grin, in conjunction with his badly receding hairline, gave his visage the look of a grinning skull.

"Lousy," I responded, as Darren and I sauntered up to his hideous machine. "I hope you've got some good news for us."

"Listen," he began, never parting those smiling teeth, "like I said, man, um, that acid is gonna take a while." Pause. Widen grin. This was his basic procedure for tantalizing us. "Some really fine hash came into Bliss Park today. Nepalese. Interested?" I had just that day, in the East Village Other, read of such a shipment! Nepalese Temple Balls, an exquisite opiated hash that looks and smells like the snow-flecked Himalayas where it is made, by hand, and rolled into multi-layered spheres. Yes, we were interested.

## II

At ten thirty the following morning, there was a knock at my window. While I still lived at home, I had a beautiful, finished basement room. I had a castro convertible, a great metal desk, and an air conditioner. But most of all, I had privacy. Luxurious, intoxicating privacy! Friends of either sex could, and did, come and go at the most incredible times. Yet never before had anyone ever dared come around at ten thirty. Gods of the Norn, man, I used to sleep till two! Then I remembered. The night before, Pete the Skull had gotten us back to the park too late to do any business. So, D and I had each split for our respective lairs, him agreeing to drop around early the next morning. Unfortunately, my idea of "early the next morning" was about one forty-five p.m.

"Morning, D," I mumbled, unlocking the basement door. "I just got up."

He grinned and nodded, then followed me into my room. Good man, Darren, one of the best I've ever met. Never said much, but when he did, it was always worth hearing. I put on my pants, and took a small key from the pocket. This key unlocked the desk drawer in my big metal office desk, which was where we kept all drugs and money during this time. Unfolding the reynold's wrap that surrounded our precious contraband, we both sat on the open castro.

"I wonder if these product uses for Reynolds Wrap are ever discussed at board meetings?" I mused.

"It hasn't hurt Mr. Baggies any, either," D added. Then: "or Mr. Bambu or Mr. Tops."

The hashish lay revealed to us, then, sprawled on a silver sheet, and all conversation ceased. Without a word, I reached down, next to the bed, and picked up a record cover and a hash pipe.

"Matches?" I asked, and Darren produced a lighter. I placed a small chip in the brass bowl and struck a flame, drawing the rich brown essence down into my lungs. And, while I maintain a near religious devotion to the wonders of marijuana, it does not satisfy the aesthetic passions. Hashish is sensual. Tactile. It even smells wonderful -- despite the presence of components ranging from honey to camel dung -- and is one blitzkrieg of a head. Pot is a workaday drug, sort of analogous in consumption to a can of beer. Hash is more like fine wine, its rich, earthy enchantments, sprinkled with white magicks. In some strange way, each individual type of hash carries a metaphysical tracing from its point of origin, whether that be a land of harsh mountains and desolate landscapes or of endless deserts, glowing red in the afternoon blaze. And so you cut away a slab, and lay it in your pipe, and once you have sucked out its substance, you look at it and see a slab of grey ash, its former shape maintained. Very symbolic. Especially after the third slab.

Suddenly, there came a series of sharp raps at the basement window. Amazed, I turned to glance at my clock, which showed not yet half-past ten.

"What the fuck is this?" I asked rhetorically. "The Breakfast Club?" For a flash, I was seized by a blind panic -- what if word had somehow reached the drug-starved public that we held a cache of what many consider the finest hash in the world? Would they storm the house? Would riots erupt in the street? Taking great care, I took a glimpse outside. Then I sighed, a combination of annoyance and relief.

"It's only Margot," I announced. Margot, mutual friend to Darren and myself, and the body who carried the illegals. In less polite circles, such a person is called a "mule". But Margot was no mule. She was our third partner, and though she never saw a cent of our profits, she went everywhere with us, never wanted for drugs, and basically lived just the sort of life she wanted to. I realize this sort of attitude toward women is considered barbaric by today's standards, but remember, this was almost ten years ago, and the times were less enlightened then. We all had fun; we never made very much money; we smoked up most of the profits. That was 1969 for you!

"Is she alone?" Darren inquired. I had thought so, but no, another look revealed she had brought company.

"Eddie's with her."

"Oh."

Eddie was my best associate (as opposed to Darren, who was my best friend.) He hung around with us constantly, smoked whenever we did, and generally shared in the good times. In return, he played court jester, sold an occasional ounce or so, and gave us an open invitation to spend as much of the summer as we liked at his beach house in Roxbury.

I opened the cellar door, and Eddie grinned foolishly, while Margot looked hopefully up at me with her little girl eyes. "Is it here?" she asked. A wink was as good as a yes, and they fair trampled me on the rush into my room.

Once inside, Eddie greeted D, then opened his eyes and flared his nostrils. "Heh, heh, heh," he left out with, in his deepest baritone, "I think I smell something gooooood!" Margot had already seated herself on the open castro as Darren refilled the pipe. As it passed from hand to hand, Margot looked up playfully.

"They know about the hash," she said.

"Who knows!?" I demanded.

"The park people. They were on their way over when Eddie and I saw them. We told them you'd be up this afternoon. We told them you wouldn't deal with them if they came around."

"Good girl," I said. Then, "Well, they had to find out. This is just as well. Now, D and I've decided to sell it in no quantity larger than a nickel. We've broken that ounce up into twenty five nicks, and we've still got --" I gestured at about a quarter ounce laying on the foil, "--all this. It was a good ounce." It's a pity, but in those days, things were generally weighed by sight. I realize how ridiculous this sounds in a time when every nickel and dime owns a triple-beam scale, but in the sixties, a "weight oz" was considered a rare find.

"Good." Margot looked to Eddie with conspiratorial glee, then, and he turned to her and nodded.

"What's up, m'dear?" Darren inquired.

"Wellllll," she began, "we know we can sell all of this tonight, right?" It was rhetorical. We could probably sell it in twelve minutes. "So there's no reason to stay in the city, and it's hot."

"So?"

"So -- remember that money Orange owes us?"

"Don't tell me he has it," I interjected, "I'm too young to have seen everything."

"No, he doesn't have it." A beat. "But he does have four tabs of double-dose window-pane. Or at least he did."

"And who has them now?" I asked, smiling. And she reached into her dungarees and retrieved four small scraps of paper, each of which held two drops of a "tasteless, odorless liquid" -- as the "Eye on Crime" poster used to describe LSD25. And I said: "So I guess we're going to Roxbury tonight!" And everybody was happy. And the fifth slab of lifeless ash dropped into the empty soda can beside the bed.

### III

The drive out to the beach was a fantastic trip. We had wound up selling those last few nicks to some upper-class schmucks from the Island for \$15 each, and barely made it into the car in one piece. As the crowd began to swell into the streets after us, Eddie lurched from the curb with a horrible screech, and we could almost smell the ocean -- especially D, who at times could smell the ocean from as far inland as Flatbush.

"Wotta fuckin' hoot!" someone declared, as we tooted past the sunset slick waters along Cross Bay Blvd. A week later, four associates would die on this very stretch of roadway, attempting to outrace the Man, high on nothing more than beer and adolescence.

Before the cool of the evening had even descended, we were pulling the auto into the Roxbury parking lot -- the streets of this private community being merely wooden boardwalk over sand. The streets are narrow, and you're never more than a block or so from the beach.

Eddie opened up his place, a typical summer bungalow off the main drag, and we dumped our belongings. I broke off a generous chunk of Nepalese, grabbed a pipe, and we all headed down to the candy store. This beaten up junk shop held the supreme location smack in the center of this odd little offshoot of the neighboring Breezy Point, yet only twice in all my visits had the joint ever been open. And on this night, as the acid began to pump through my system, and my senses whirled in a supremely controlled choreography, it did not choose to violate tradition. And, scattered in front of the boarded-up beach shanty, sat a group of Beach Children.

"H'lo, Eddie," someone said, but in the darkness I couldn't say who. The Beach Children had begun a large fire out on one of the rocky jetties that sprawled into the sea at equidistant points down this stretch of coast. Now, with the darkness rapidly shrouding over them, another even more gigantic bonfire was set on the concrete flat outside the decrepit candy store. And as this blaze began to sputter and crackle and curl upwards into the star-speckled firmament, I could begin to distinguish individuals among the Beach People. There was Joey, who last summer had gotten so whacked on goofballs that he initiated a phone booth-stuffing. Things went awry, however, when somebody lit a cigaret. Joey's leg was on fire almost half a minute before he realized he was the source of smoke. The barbituates had dulled his senses to such an absurd degree that, even as they dragged him out into the sand and his older brother beat out the flames with his hands, he had continued to inquire through a drugged, heavy-lidded stupor: "Is it me? Am I burning? Hey, man, is it me?" His brother's hands still wore the scars of that night, and Joey never again wore shorts.

I stood beside Darren at the edge of the minor conflagration which, even now, the locals continued to feed, and one by one the Beach People would walk up to us, say their hellos and then offer to buy, beg, sell or trade drugs -- any drugs, all drugs. I returned the greetings, but only one member of this peculiar group had anything to interest me. His name was Tommy, and he was Prince of these folk, if he was anything at all, which I doubted. He had somehow weazled -- probably from Margot -- the information concerning our secret cachet of hashish, and as the drought had been particularly harsh on the Beach Folk, he was willing to trade most anything in return for a piece. He was a good-looking sandy-haired boy of no more than fourteen summers, and he wore the standard garb of his tribe -- thick, patched dungarees and a heavy, hooded sweatshirt (evenings are cold at the shore). Tommy, like Joey and his brother and maybe a total of five others, was a year-rounder. His people were essentially white trash who had more-or-less winterized their summer quarters after being forced to sell their regular house. We had come to Roxbury during the previous winter, and the experience had profoundly shaken me. I hadn't realized people would live in these tumble-down shacks once October winds began to blow. But as we stood in front of the locked and boarded candy store, in the howling wind and bone-numbing cold, we watched a group of four Beach People appear over the rise near Grasslands. Barely discernable through the thick gauze of flying, windblown sand, and spray from the nearby sea, they moved toward us as the prearranged meeting time drew near. In January, the Northeastern Coast is no place to be, I told myself, and the hardbitten faces of the year-rounders agreed. Dressed in heavy-duty workpants, insulated, hooded sweatshirts, and heavy outer jackets, they had arrived at the designated spot without a word or sign of recognition. And as Darren and Eddie, our go-between, transacted business, I thought back to a story I'd once heard, of the first white settlers in the New England area. The winters there were too hard to be endured, and food was ever scarce. So, those deemed able, were sent out into the forest to be covered over with a thick blanket of leaves and shrubbery. There, they would spend the winter in a state of near-hibernation, their metabolisms slowing, heartbeats winding down, and minds shutting out the cold, the brutal, unending cold...

That was it, I realized. These Beach People, in winter, wore the look of sleepwalkers. And as they ambled back to their winter haunts, I observed their zombie-like gait, their slow, mechanical plodding, somehow I was deeply disturbed. And I knew I would never return

here in winter.

But it was the summer sun that had just plunked down behind the horizon, and Tommy's face seemed warmed, animated, as he reached into his sweatshirt pocket and drew out a small capsule of a crushed, brown substance. "Organic mescaline," he lied. But I had seen this type of psilosiben before, and coveted it as a booster to the acid already coursing through my system. A trade was arrived at, and the exchange was made. But as I dumped the capsule's contents onto a magazine, and snorted it in four sections -- sharing it equally with Darren, of course -- the crowd of Beach People seemed to swell, and we both felt the need to escape. I talked to Eddie, and he arranged to borrow a boat. Our destination was uncertain, but Eddie claimed to know of an isolated beach that would be just perfect, and so within the half-hour, the sound of an outboard motor was churning through the night, and as we drew away from shore, we continued to watch the candy store, the bonfire burning higher into the blackness, and the world flattened out into shadows. I heard the water slipping and bubbling alongside the speedboat, but my eyes sought new stimulation, and found it in the sky behind the bonfire. An enormous skeleton, rising into the wisps of evening clouds, standing dead against the painted backdrop of desolation. It had been intended as a housing project, before funds, or something, ran out.

And off the bow, another skeleton! This one Rockaway Bridge itself, the most nuts and bolts bridge in New York, moonlight glinting through its infinity of holes. Nobody spoke aboard the boat as we toiled beneath it, each in our own division of perception, opening another doorway to the same closet. Eddie guided us with admirable ease, and before long we had entered into a narrow inlet, near the Sheepshead Bay. He cut the outboard, and we glided across the black glass surface toward yet another, but smaller bridge.

"This is Garrison Beach," Eddie whispered, then, nodding up at the viaduct, "and that - is Garrison Bridge." In response, a lone automobile roared across this sturdy looking gantry, and we ferried underneath. The end of this inlet lay some hundred yards dead ahead.

"Let's turn this around and go ashore," I instructed. Immediately, the motor roared back up and we made an abrupt u-turn back underneath Garrison Bridge. Then the motor was cut entirely, and we slipped quietly toward shore.

"We should have brought torches," I joked, as Eddie dragged the speedboat onto the beach. He grinned then, and reached under a seat in order to retrieve a canvas, Army-surplus sack. Toting it onto the shore, he spread its contents before us -- flares, at least ten of them.

We each took one and moved up the beach, planting them in the sand at agreed upon distances. We then struck them in sequence, and watched with delight as they sputtered and hissed and sent a burst of green smoke hurling into the night, before they each ignited, and burned with the brightness of a dozen sparklers. This sudden splash of illumination was not without effect, and I heard Margot scream as she watched a small, shadowy figure scamper up this steeply inclined stretch of coast.

"What was it?" she asked, stunned in lysergic horror. The light had flattened the perspective, and you have to be sure. "I saw something, didn't I?"

Reality confirmed. "Looked like a rat," Eddie opined. And we all agreed that, of course, that's what it was.

I looked over the area. We weren't far from the highway, obviously, but banked at such an extreme collection of angles, that all but the very tops of cars were obscured to our

view -- and we were obscured entirely from theirs. Further up the strand, nearer the bridge, the coast rose again, over a fairly steep rock-cliff. It was low tide now, but I imagined that at absolute high tide, the sea would rise some halfway up that cliff-face. But the real find here was the bridge itself.

"This bridge seems awful big," someone said. Me. I said it. It reached out over the narrow inlet, a pair of nearly -identical beaches on either side, into which were set the two towers that supported the extended portion. Cast in concrete, but left hollow, these blocks were enormous when viewed up close. A tunnel was carved through each tower, some twenty-five feet high. And in the center of this tunnel, in the wall, was a hole, an entrance into an enormous hollowed out chamber within the block. Running some fifty feet high, the chamber itself was in the range of fifty feet by forty feet, and dark as the abyss. I stood beside it, alone, laughing, pissing up against the wall, listening to the water trickle and echo through this artificial cave. I was happy. The brown organic was turning the trick, and I felt as if someone were pumping up my ego, when everything was shattered by a sound.

No, not just a sound. A sound you hear. This -- noise -- I felt. A rattle, like a snake -- and a hiss, as well! But, no, it's more of a dragging sound, like a chain being pulled through the wet sand of that eternal darkness within. My Lord, I hear it again!

"Darren!" I shouted once, finally. I had dropped my flare, and it choked and died in the sand beside me. D had already seen the light fade and expire, and was on his way up the incline when he heard me call. I saw him appear at the tunnel entrance, limned with a golden haze from his own flare, gripped firmly in hand, at the exact same second I heard the -- thing -- for the third time.

"Jesus Christ--!" I heard D say, and I was pleased he too had heard it. Madness is best when shared with friends. He moved into the tunnel, his footsteps bouncing off the curved walls, lighting up this nightworld and the graffiti murals that decorated its entire insides. "Are you all right, m'man?"

I shook my head.

"What was that?"

"I...don't know," I said, finally. "Something."

Once more, louder now, very loud. It was obviously so close to that hole in the wall, that we both backed up. I collected what wits I had, and dug my dead flare from the sand and held its tip on the surface of Darren's. The sand that had fused onto it glistened for an instant, became glass, then became nothing as my torch again flamed-on. Then bravely, we extended the flares into the inky maw, and stared for a second at the inside of the chamber.

#### IV

As we stumbled back down the beach, I saw Margot look up from the bottom, call to Eddie, and point up at us. She had started laughing, I didn't know why. We reached base camp, and we were breathing hard.

"Eddie, we gotta collect some bottles. There must be plenty along here." He looked at me funny. I explained, "Eddie -- there's something up there -- in the tower, the chamber inside, man, some fucking beast!" He looked at me funnier. Then he walked up the beach a ways, and headed toward the tunnel, shaking his head.

"Margot," I said, turning my attention to her, "help us find empty bottles, okay?"

"Bottles? Why?" Then, "a beast?"

Carrying the flares carefully, lest the acid drip down the handle and badly burn us, we scouted the beach and found some five empty soda and beer bottles. Already, cans were taking over the world. Margot methodically cleaned each one, and stood them in the sand. Each gust of wind seemed to make my skin crawl. Something funny about the wind, I thought, and then I heard the beast again.

"Did you hear that?" Darren asked, astounded. He thought he might have been smelling the sea in Flatbush again, but no, we'd heard it as well. How loud it was! The sound whooshed out the tunnel, then dripped down to the sea, covering us in a horrible miasma of fear and excitement.

The bottles were all cleaned and ready as Eddie stepped from the darkness.

"I'll pour the gas," he told us.

Each bottle was filled half-way with gasoline, and I tore my tee shirt into long, thin strips, for use as fuses. These were then stuffed into the bottles, which were themselves placed in the canvas sack. Each of us, then, carrying a flare, moved up the sandy hill, led by Eddie and his tinkling knapsack of molotov cocktails. Halfway up the hill, the tunnel seemed to come alive with the noises of the beast once again, and we stopped in our tracks. The wind began to prickle our skin.

At the top of the hill, outside the tunnel that led to the beast's lair, we sat down and defied him. Staking a flare into the sandy soil, we sat around and passed the pipe.

V

"You stay here," I instructed Margot. "Anything comes near you, just hold out that flare. And watch your hand, that shit burns."

"She nodded once, and I moved into the tunnel, behind D and Eddie.

"Holee Shit!" Eddie exclaimed, seeing the walls covered with phone numbers and rank-outs and graphic depictions of oral sex. I remember that someone had spray-painted: ANYONE WANTS GOOD COCK COME SEE ME. "This wasn't here before!"

"Who hangs out here, Eddie?" I asked.

"Nobody from Roxbury. They don't like the place. I know a couple chicks up Breezy come here for nookie," he laughed. "But people never hung out here before."

"They sure do now," Darren was saying, when the beast roared, and the tunnel filled with a horrible, thick odor -- much like the miasma we had detected earlier, down on the beach. I heard Eddie gag. And then the dragging sounds commenced, so loud it was unbelievable -- so terrifying that even now my hands tremble at the memory. And then, just like that, silence.

In the quiet, it was hard to believe there had ever been a sound at all. But Eddie's retching noises were evidence enough. Still, the mushroom had unfurled within me, and I burned like a phoenix, adrenalin racing in my veins, and everything hyped by the Nepalese!



"Let's go," I said. And we stalked across the tunnel, and looked again into the yawning blackness.

"Fucking shit," Eddie commented, wiping the puke from his lips.

"It's big, isn't it?" Darren asked. "Who's going first?"

But, baby, I was body surfing now, and the swelling of my neural connectors pushed me into the opening before anyone could even answer. Climbing, scrambling, I quickly seated myself on the concrete ledge, and extended my flare deep into the ebon emptiness. I was looking down, and had with great interest detected human footprints in the moist sand below, when I realized that the beast was above me.

"Oh, my god!"

Raven black, leathery wings dragged across the cavern roof, moving just above me in the midnight dusk, hissing again, rattling my brain with blind, animal panic. And I hurled myself into the darkness.

"Bill?"

"I'm inside. Watch it, the thing flies. It moved above me."

I saw light fill the aperture, then heard scraping noises, and saw one of my party reach the shelf above me. "It's a long, fucking way down," I advised. And the figure leaped, holding a flare, and I saw that it was Darren, just before I heard him land behind me in the soft, damp sand.

"Fuckshit," he commented, picking up the flare which had been jarred loose with his landing. Now more light appeared above, and Eddie appeared in the cavern gap, carrying a flare and the canvas sack.

"You stay up there!" I called. "Drop us some cocktails, though." Gingerly, he lifted two of the bottles from the bag, then lowered the rest in our direction. We were staking flares in the ground, and I reached up for the weapons. But the more flares we struck, the more awesome the interior became. The blackness was so dense that even a newly ignited flare only burned away a small portion of the black hole in which we now stood. "Fuck the flares," I finally decided, "Con-Ed couldn't light up this place--"

The beast again! Dragging, slithering, warning, he began to shatter our minds with his horrible, dragging roar -- and still above us -- right near Eddie!. "Eddie--!"

"I hear him!" And Eddie stood up in the opening, and stretched out his long thin arm. "Can't see anything!" And before I realized what was happening, he had picked up one of his cocktails, and lit the cotton fuse. It streaked the nightmare air as it flew, and with a burst of glass, exploded on the opposite wall. And, what had seconds earlier been a shrine to darkness, erupted into a near-nova brightness.

We drew back from the intense heat, but within seconds the gasoline had burned itself out. "One more, Eddie!"

With the second explosion, we finally saw it. I screamed.

The beast was flying right toward me. Yet I stood, transfixed, enchanted by the

wonder of it all, only peripherally aware of Darren to my side, lighting a cocktail and hurling it at the onrushing beast. The bomb exploded in front of the thing, but it never paused. I saw its eyes in that instant, and they were milk white and empty as the night in which they had ever lived. I realized we had blinded it as it flew through the sheet of flame, and roared on toward me, mindlessly ignoring its own destruction.

"Look out!" Eddie was screaming, and I still don't understand why, at the last possible instant, it flew up and away. I had looked into the unseeing eyes of mindless fate, and had not blinked.

But as the beast, now dripping flame as its body seemed to melt before our eyes, spattered into the ceiling, the spell was broken, and Darren and I both scampered up the cavern wall, toward the outstretched arms of our companion. I heard another voice, then, far away. And as I reached the opening and watched D and Eddie leap to earth, I heard something else...

"Why?" it asked.

I turned and stared at a crumbling ball of flame, stuck to the ceiling, dripping fireballs onto the moist sand below. And I heard that other voice again. It was Margot.

"A storm! C'mon, Bill, hurry up! Eddie says --"

Then, the last firey remnant of the beast fell from the ceiling, landing on the canvas bag that contained the remaining cocktails. At that instant, I lost heart, turned and leaped away, as behind me, the chamber exploded in a roar of flame.

#### EPILOGUE

Time has a way of playing on our memories, I'll acknowledge that. And who would seriously believe such a yarn from a self-confessed user of drugs? Who, indeed? But it has not been my purpose to convince you. In fact, I sincerely hope you take me for a lying fool, for that would be best.

I only know that as we roared away from Garrison Bridge that night, a storm already beginning to flow us about, clouds billowing black in the distance, I turned once more back to shore. And I saw... I saw...

But, does it matter? I was the only one who even looked. And certainly, by now, you know enough to take what I say in the proper spirit. Someday, I may even return to Garrison, and lay the ghost -- the pitiable, blind ghost -- to rest.

-- Bill Kunkel

# FOURPLAYOOOOOO

Arnie: How can you mention "Mississippi Riverboat Race" without reminding our fellow stars which pair of luminaries won The Great Paddleboat Race? Modesty forbids mentioning who did all that gut-wrenching paddling while Someone Else kept babbling about the Jewels of Opar or some such nonsense.

But it's important not to depart too swiftly from the topic of food, for Man's Daily Bread looms large in Strickland's mythos. It was amazing to me, as we strolled the spacious grounds of the resort, to see so many people who were 50 or more pounds out of shape. If there weren't two-dozen 250-lb. women there, then there wasn't one. Ned Sonntag would have loved Strickland's.

Therefore, as you might expect, mealtimes were cacophonous with the sounds of knives slicing into tender chicken, glasses of gin clinking in shaky hands and forks scraping the last few crumbs of deepdish apple pie from the plate. The weekend was a "one price covers everything including meals and tips" affair, and most of the guests showed every intention of digesting their money's worth.

In short, people were making complete pigs of themselves. I, myself, showed the nature restraint for which I am famous. I ate scarcely more than I would have at home. Unless you want to count the chocolate hot fudge sundaes I had with every single meal. It's a measure of Strickland's that the marvelous woman who was our waitress did not even blink when I ordered one for breakfast.

Joyce: And after breakfast -- to the sports complex! I had been particularly anxious to try indoor archery, hoping some natural ability would surge forth and show me in my true guise as Robin Hoodess. This, alas, did not prove to be the case.

I had been twanging away quite ineffectually at the safety-netting-swathed target (filled with the ineffectual arrows from onslaughts by other inept bowmen), when Bill bounded off the nearby basketball court to show me that I was holding the arrows wrong (or something). Having learned this nifty trick, I vigorously renewed my attempt to establish myself as a forest highwayman. Another set of arrows failed to go where I directed, and another career opportunity was lost forever.

But, like a free spirit, I simply found another by walking over to the basketball court to join the game. It was then that I fully appreciated for the first time what an advantage an extra foot in height would be. So much for playing guard.

Bill: I'll tell you something else; my golf game has improved 100%. In fact, in the last 18 holes I've hacked since returning from Paradise Lost, I've taken off a good five strokes. I've begun combining putting with TM -- building a zen-like rapport with the ball.

And at the last hole, I got the ball in the clown's nose.

Joyce: My proudest moment was actually roller skating... probably also my scariest.

Arnie: Roller skating didn't scare me at all. Never turned a hair. Of course, I also didn't roller skate. With my sense of physical balance as bad as it is, it's one of those things I know enough to not even try.

I did, however, want to test my skill at basketball. So while the other three took turns playing William Tell in one corner of the indoor complex, I was pretending to be

Fourplay - IV

Bill Walton in another. There's no chance that I'll be mistaken for big Bill when it comes to shooting. My attempts to emulate him produced about five consecutive shots that sailed over the top of the backboard the first time I stepped on the court. Eventually, I had the satisfaction of popping them through the cords with passable success before I was too pooped to continue.

I did a much better job of emulating Mr. Walton in another aspect of basketball for which the super center is also justly famous; I injured myself. I didn't do it playing basketball, but rather on the resort's indoor miniature golf course. I smashed my ankle against a wooden marker, but though it swelled up to twice normal size, it didn't stop me from consistently breaking par and winning most of the rounds for a change.

Charlene: And let's not forget the pleasures of the game room. In addition to pinball and air hockey tables, it was thoughtfully equipped with a juke box stocked with Warren Zevon. This meant that we didn't have to go a whole weekend without our "Roland, the Headless Thompson Gunner" fix -- a double blessing, since one of Strickland's very few faults was the Muzak-quality background music available just about everywhere. The game room was particularly useful as a "warm up" after a meal. It was a place where you could work yourself up slowly to something more strenuous, like the indoor heated pool.

Bill: But whether you were flying high on the basketball court or floating on the bottom of the pool, you were constantly made aware of the fact that, brother, this is the Top of the Line. Everything was made to fit just right. Except the towels. Scrawny, pathetic things they were, convincing me for all time that one man's bathtowel is another man's handkerchief. I don't know why this place didn't have any goddamn decent-sized towels. When a family of frogs goes to the beach, they take larger towels than that.

Arnie: The towels were wretched, but there's no denying that they were dispensed with a loving kindness I've never previously experienced, at least not from people I was expected not to tip.

Even the maids were polite, almost unheard of these days. Once when we had to leave the living room in great haste -- the courtesy car had arrived to take us to lunch -- we left the table strewn with several bags of herbs, an ashtray and a couple of glass pipes. When we returned to the chateau after the meal, we found the maid had cleaned our place while we were gone. Not only did she leave our stash in the same condition she found it, but she had even taken the trouble to arrange all the paraphernalia into an attractive centerpiece. That's what I call polite service.

Charlene: Well, of course, the whole thing about that place is that you can do whatever you want so long as you don't disturb anyone else. And when you're staying in a completely detached "chalet" like the Timberlines, it's pretty unlikely that you're going to bother the other guests. And the saunas even had a timer so you couldn't get too stoned and bake yourself. They're so thoughtful.

Arnie: But now we're back in New York City, and Strickland's is as far away as Xanadu, a lurid red land of Oz over the rainbow. And now it's time to come back to earth and bid adieu for another month. See you all then.

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NEXT RENEGADE CULTURE