

PUMP ROCKETS

It's not uncommon to see toy collectors evaluate the Frontier Woman by turning her upside down and checking for underwear. Her panties were the first thing to go. Only the most responsible kids held onto them. Some collectors have solved the problem—and problem is the word they'd use—by substituting underwear from a similar doll. But to serious collectors, only originals will do, even though they cost hundreds of dollars. The Frontier Family was part of Raven Corporation's Posables line, a set of four 8-inch action figures released for Christmas 1975. No one expected them to be collectible. So they are. But without her panties, the Frontier Woman is incomplete. Without the panties, a collection is incomplete. Ergo, the collector feels incomplete. Feeling so and being so evidently indistinguishable, a quest begins.

I am not a collector. I did not expect to see photographs of Frontier undies on my computer screen. I sat in my office reading an email from a proud toy collector who'd recently acquired these rare undergarments. He shared a peep beneath the figure's floor-length skirt, her drawers snow cloud white. All the way in Northampton, England, Brad Wilkinson collected every action figure, playset, and vehicle made by Raven Corp. I collected his emails. It almost broke my heart not to answer them. The first arrived nearly a year ago: "Dear Mr. Carrigan: I write not only to compliment the exceptional quality of your father's products but to ask if you have information on several items that interest me as a toy historian . . ." Toy historian? Surely this was not an occupation. Brad's chipper emails featured a pleasant refrain of apologetic phrases: "if you don't mind," "if it's not too much trouble," and my favorite, "I would consider it no small favor if you would . . ." His notes addressed me with a degree of respect I was sure I didn't deserve.

I didn't know how these people found me. I lived far from the Manhattan offices where toys sprang from drafting table to prototype before being sent

into production overseas. The New Brunswick warehouses had long since been picked clean by collectors hopeful for left-behind pallets of toys and scraps of invoices suitable for framing. Nothing much was left undiscovered. The only sure conduit to Raven magic, some believed, was the Carrigan family, and there were only three of us left. My brother Pete had spun this attention into paid public appearances, symbolic involvements in toy franchises, and even a stint on that cable TV nostalgia regurgitator, *Remember That?!!* I didn't want the attention and I was tired of the same questions: What was it like to grow up with all those toys?

I suppose it's not too different from being the child of a president or a celebrity. Ask Amy Carter, or Chelsea Clinton, or Hugh Hefner's children. Or some real-life Charlie who inherited a chocolate factory. When you're placed in proximity to an abundance of toys, you don't necessarily grow up differently than any other kid, you just dream about different things. Or I did, anyway, unaware that my situation was enviable until other children envied me. Unlike them, I never spent a second wondering how great it would be if my father ran a toy company.

In another minute, I would have finished Brad's note if my manager hadn't stepped into my cubicle. Dwayne held his leather-bound notebook, which meant he had other business besides me and wouldn't linger.

"What's that there?" he asked, eyes fixed on my computer screen.

"Oh, just toys. Old toys, collectible now."

"I didn't know you collected dolls."

You didn't have to be smart to manage a marketing department, and Dwayne wasn't.

"I don't," I said. "This is someone else's collection."

Without taking his eyes from the screen, he detailed the projects he wanted moved up in priority. Prioritize them, he said. My other projects, of course, also deserved priority. I nodded along, wondering if I should click a button and remove the underwear from the screen. It seemed too late

now, too sheepish a gesture. Besides, I hadn't asked for photographs of doll underwear. Acting embarrassed only made me seem guilty, and I wasn't—I was almost sure of that.

Nothing else Dwayne said registered. In an hour I'd go for lunch, a solitary walk to a shady spot downtown where I might escape the humidity of late September Baltimore.

As far as I could tell, our company sold software that enabled companies to bill each other. I kept revising our promotional materials to show how simple our products could make the process. I took down notes from the design team, asked a few questions, and then rearranged what they said into bullet points. My word processor did most of the work. I just added an exclamation point and increased the numbers by one, like so: "Up to 3 times faster!" Six months later I'd change it to "Almost 4 times faster!" or add another exclamation point. Sometimes I'd design the text to look handwritten, with the implied notion that a real person was saying the things I was being paid to say, and that they were true, more true than something typed. Our font for authentic handwriting produced the neatest cursive I'd ever seen—the penmanship of an exemplary fifth grader. I'd been hired for my knack for finding careful ways of suggesting things that weren't exactly true. I came to think of lies as harmless coatings over perfectly fine products, like shellac over ceramic that added sheen and luster. I held out hope that eventually we'd make something that wouldn't need shellacking.

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After lunch, I went back to Brad's email. Brad hoped to see me at this year's FantastiCon, a three-day blowout of comic books, vintage toy exhibits, and special appearances by actors from science fiction films. I'd never attended a convention. Brad's next sentence stopped me dead: "I assume you are going to hear your brother's presentation." Not having paid any attention to FantastiCon, it had also escaped my notice that Pete Carrigan would be one of its special guests. I hadn't seen him in six years.

A biographical sketch, with assistance from my mother, who sometimes did hear from Pete: B.S. degree, University of Michigan, class of '89. Pharmaceutical rep, Detroit. Absconds with samples and a month's pre-orders. Owner and operator of brick oven pizzeria, Charlotte, North Carolina. Marries first wife. Buys out partner and months later loses business to fire. Starts small chain of coffee shops in Seattle and is bought out by a fast-growing conglomerate. Arrested at the site of a speed lab in San Francisco. No charges filed. Falsely accused of smoking hashish at a go-kart track, Father's Day, 1994. Following year, buys satellite TV interest, flips it six days later. Promotes summer festival of "alternative music" in Tucson. Event cancelled due to poor ticket sales. Remarries. Acts as sales rep, in a purely ornamental role, for Mattel's nostalgia line: Pick-up Pete and the Dare Gang. Graces cover for Raven-76's third album, *Gripper*. Raven-76 was a cutesy indie band whose members weren't old enough to have played with Raven toys. The photo is Pete's school portrait circa 1974. Bucktoothed, freckled, Pete wears a checked flannel shirt, his unruly hair slicked down by a giveaway comb no doubt moistened in the water fountain moments prior to the shot. I saw this photo in magazines, in music stores, on the internet, and hanging on the wall along the stairs of my house when I left for work in the morning. The members of Raven-76 had yet to appear on their album covers, preferring to feature obscure pop culture heroes. Which is what Pete had become, I suppose. It had nearly happened to me.

Do children of the '70s have me and Pete to thank for many of their playthings—their scooters, magnetic easels, target games, and action figures? They do. Once we became cognizant members of the Carrigan family, running roughshod over freshly-mowed lawns, plastic toys in tow, we became more than my father's sons. We were a testing ground, his research and development department. Certainly we're responsible for Harmonica Helmet, though years later my father would tell *ToyTime* he got the idea by watching Bob Dylan. That made a better sound bite, but the truth was he'd watched Pete and me playing football and realized our huffing and puffing might serve another purpose. He thought kids might enjoy playing the harmonica

without having to hold it. Labels all over the package warned that the helmet was for amusement, not protection. The amusement was scant: you couldn't play songs on the thing, and the in- and out-take of breath created a sound like a locomotive. Worst of all, you couldn't really hear the music. Harmonica Helmet insulated its wearer from most sounds. Yet Raven sold thousands of units on the concept alone. The *idea* of it. Harmonica Helmet debuted in the early days, when my father had a hand in design, not just licensing, before the company shifted its focus from cheap novelties to dolls and action figures. And everything changed.

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In 1975, you could buy a Posable action figure at Kresge, Two Guys, Zayre, Child's World, Memco, Woolco, or Miracle Mart for less than three dollars. Like Raven, those stores no longer exist. Today, for the price of a Posable in its original box, you could buy a few nights in a high-rise casino hotel in Atlantic City, plus room service. I was a guest in such a place, where at 10:30 A.M. in the Diving Horse Ballroom, my brother would speak about the history of Raven Corp. When we were kids, Pete had never shown any interest in Dad's company, but lately he'd found a way to make a living as the son of Charles Carrigan. Pete's notoriety derived from his appearance in a 1975 television commercial for a missile game called Pump Rockets. In jeans, a striped shirt, and an unfortunate bowl-headed haircut, Pete bounds out the front door of a house to join up with two equally enthusiastic friends. "Let's pump it!" Pete exclaims, fist in the air. The kids launch foam rockets into the sky and follow the trajectory of their missiles with slack-jawed awe. The game is now scarce, but the commercial lives on in DVD compilations.

In the casino's grand entranceway, I stood before a fountain inhabited by a mechanized elephant that squirted water from its trunk at regular intervals. Tourists threw coins into the shallow pool while others sought better odds on the casino floor. My linen shirt, a hold-over from summer, already appeared wrinkled and damp. I was sweating out coffee and my mouth had gone dry. Maybe it was the prospect of seeing Pete again, or standing fifty feet from a full-blown exhibit of Raven memorabilia—the

most stuff I'd seen in decades. It was a big gulp of sensory information for someone who'd put that kind of thing out of mind for a good while. Bundle of nerves or not, no one would notice me among the costumed attendees—space cowboys, super heroes, and a Viking couple. At the dealer tables, they bargained for discounts on tapes and DVDs, capes swishing. Someone was selling LET'S PUMP IT! bumper stickers. I stood in line behind men without costumes who still wore a uniform of sorts: sneakers, jeans, black T-shirts with comic book heroes on the front, size XL. One guy wore a Raven-76 shirt, my brother's mug beaming from the front. Anyone who dwells on lost toys from the seventies probably nurses feelings greater than nostalgia, feelings that impel them to pack up their ray gun and rubber ears and drive to a convention, a low-stress gathering of like-minded folks and plenty of merchandise to fuel the obsession.

At the registration tables, I paid my fifty dollars and didn't drop the family name to gain free entry. I didn't know if it would work, and the pros of getting comped could be obliterated by the cons: nagging fans descending upon mysterious Carrigan son #2. Princess Diana used to refer to her sons as the heir and the spare. My father would have appreciated the joke. Would anyone recognize me? I had my father's wiry brown hair that would have been curly if I didn't keep it cut close.

Inside the exhibit, photos mounted on pasteboard depicted Raven milestones, including advertisements that ran in comic books and a full page from the Sears catalog. The colorful ads boasting of Raven's products, season after season, made it seem as if the company was gangbusters from day one. I saw little evidence of Raven's inauspicious origin prior to my birth when my father struggled to break out of the junk business. Raven manufactured novelties from salvaged materials—what would later be called recycled aluminum. The impulse here was profit, not ecology, though it didn't matter what you called it. Raven produced stamped out, cheap plated cars that retailed for less than a dollar. Parents bought these toys impulsively, a quick fix for a screaming toddler. Industry insiders called the toys "hush-ups." They'd get left behind in a restaurant, forgotten in a taxi.

Taking a major leap forward, Raven introduced Barry Dangerous for the 1973 Christmas season. Barry wore an olive drab uniform and carried a rifle, binoculars, and a canteen. Barry Dangerous was 8 inches tall, a smaller and cheaper alternative to a popular, much more established 12-inch action figure with a military theme. That guy—not Barry—was the first “action figure,” the one that proved boys would play with such toys if they weren’t called dolls. In the late sixties, he’d been a huge hit, spawning scores of imitators, including my father, who got to the game late. But he had an angle: undercut the price by making a less expensive figure. He reduced the figure’s height by four inches and dropped the price a few dollars.

Though retailers placed large orders for Barry Dangerous, they sold poorly. Vietnam had soured people on military toys. To my father and his employees, toys must have seemed immune from political disgust, Nixon-aversion. Flag waving didn’t cease entirely, and the military didn’t close its doors, but enough parents had reservations about war toys to keep Barry Dangerous out of their shopping carts. Barry Dangerous languished on the shelves and an excess of inventory accumulated in the warehouses. What to do with toys nobody wanted was the problem no one seemed capable of solving until my father took Barry’s head between his thumb and forefinger and popped it off as if twisting open a bottle of beer. The body was fine. The problem was Barry. Different heads and clothes for Barry Dangerous would bring a variety of possibilities. Barry didn’t have to be a soldier—he could be anyone! My father’s team reconfigured the inventory and designed additional outfits. Anything that could be reused—boots, belts, helmets—was. Barry Dangerous bit the dust, but he gave his body so that other figures might live.

As a copycat military hero, Barry Dangerous had proved disastrous, but he had a bright future—from the neck down and in different duds—as a cowboy, Indian, astronaut, race car driver, deep sea diver, and comic book hero. It seems obvious now, but it was all new then. With the expense of the body design already factored into the costs associated with launching Barry Dangerous, the heads and clothing were minimal in comparison. A few new head sculptures, some reused ones (Barry Dangerous with an eye patch becomes

a pirate), and Raven could release an entire line with just months of lead-time. The factories held an abundance of unassembled Barry Dangerous figures. Set Barry's head aside and put another head on his shoulders. It's easy: the soft, flexible neck stem fits into the hole at the top of the torso. Do this several hundred times, several thousand times, several hundred thousand times, and you've got something new. Let's call it the Old West. Gunslingers! Outlaws with pistols, rifles, and later, next Christmas, perhaps, Indians with tomahawks. The violence hasn't gone anywhere, but it's a violence parents can live with, exiled to a fantasy world that is the past. Real toys aren't toys at all—they're miniature replicas, and no one wants a replica of something that they want to forget. Please, no tiger camouflage, M-16s, hand grenades, or dog tags. Too familiar, too soon, too painful. Let's give children toys that represent who we want to be, not who we really are.

Kids don't know they want the Old West figures. They won't know until Chuck shows them. They'll make up their own minds, but he's hopeful. The hell with stagflation, he tells anyone who'll listen. Ideal sold a million Shirley Temple dolls during the Depression. Anything is possible. Dream it and it is so.

I walked along the partition wall adorned with Raven catalog covers, diagrams, board game instructions, and flattened cardboard packages. The informative panels, no doubt written by some eager beaver with more free time on his hands than Brad Wilkinson, contained numerous typographical errors and factual inaccuracies. The panels got the factories in the Guangdong Province mixed up with those in Hong Kong, called the Frontier Family the Pioneer Family, and mislabeled accessories for the haunted house. The biggest goof concerned *The Island of Dr. Moreau*. Collectors speculate endlessly over why the action figures don't resemble the actors in the movie. I didn't have to speculate; I was there.

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In the summer of 1976, my father's job kept him away so often that my only memory of our family together is at the company picnic at Lake Lenape. You could splash around in paddle boats or canoes, climb jungle gyms. My

mother warned me away from the horseshoe pits lest a horseshoe crack my head open. That was her number one admonition to me and Pete—to guard against cracking our heads open. Married as she was to the inventor of Harmonica Helmet, she had a lot of nerve fretting over the integrity of our skulls. Thankfully, we were hard-headed kids. We'd play rough-tackle football, hitting the grass so hard we'd see stars. Then walk it off, shake it off, and hike! We were daredevils, Pete and me, indestructible.

That afternoon was too hot for daredevils, at least while the sun was still high. I played Go Fish with my father and Mitch DeCoursey, his vice-president and right-hand man. Mitch wore a dark purple velour shirt and chain-smoked throughout the game. We sat at a picnic table with the benches bolted to the ground. My brother and Mitch's son Kyle were playing volleyball but I wasn't tall enough to be any good.

When Harvey Bancropft appeared at the table, rumpled and sweaty, my father dealt him in. Harvey called me Chuck Jr., which he knew wasn't my name. He was drinking, I noticed, but so were other men. Their wives could drive them home if it came to that, though it probably wouldn't. Harvey didn't have a wife.

My father slipped away from our game and stepped behind the snack bar. I was optimistic. He could be bringing back any number of treats for us, and I knew better than to follow him to see—that would spoil the surprise. I was going to ask for Harvey's eights. I doubted he had any but I wanted to hear his reply—he never answered the same way twice. "Stroll down to the fishin' hole and inquire there," was his last one.

Mitch played it like a high-stakes poker match, his hand close to his chest. Mitch was the kind of guy who would always chose Ginger over MaryAnn, no matter how many times Ginger broke his heart. But he crunched numbers like a demon and he broke balls, my father said. "When I send Mitch to the licensors," he always bragged, "he comes back with the whole store."

"Give me all your eights," I commanded Harvey.

"My eights!" he exclaimed, hand on heart.

My father stepped into view around the corner of the snack shop. He held the receiver of a payphone. I swung my legs over the bench and tried to listen to what he was saying. He was too far away. A minute later, he hung up and returned to the table. He didn't sit.

"We can't use Lancaster's head," my father said.

Mitch looked like he'd just bitten into something spoiled.

My father may as well have been speaking Chinese. What was Lancaster? It sounded like the technical terms my father and his friends often tossed about. Die-cast? Mitch took out a flair pen and began scrawling on a napkin, tearing it while soaking it with black ink. His lips moved as he calculated. Harvey looked pleasantly vacant, as always. I knew we'd never finish our game. They would leave their cards or flip them over and declare me winner.

Mitch looked up from his napkin. "That's a deal-breaker."

"C'mon, Mitch. We don't need his head." My father sat down on the bench.

"I spoke to the studio people personally. It's a separate license to replicate the actors' likenesses. We've got the character license."

"What would it take to do the actors?"

"More money than it's worth. We'll have to scrap the whole line."

"I had lunch at a studio once," Harvey told me. "A really filling meal."

Mitch looked at Harvey. "What studio?"

Harvey smiled.

My father tapped on his cards without picking them up. "You've got the Lone Ranger's autograph, don't you, Harvey?"

"Hell potato pie I do! He still wears the mask. Sometimes the mask and a tuxedo, sometimes the mask and a sports coat."

"I've heard he wears the mask." My father closed his eyes and rubbed his temples.

"It's *The Island of Dr. Moreau*," Harvey whispered to me. "Wild animals crossed with humans." He bared his teeth in a fierce expression.

My father opened his eyes. “We’ll do it without the likeness. He’s a mad scientist. He doesn’t have to look like Lancaster. Kids don’t care. Parents buy the toys and they don’t care either.”

“I don’t know . . .” Mitch began.

“Seth, do you care if the action figure for Dr. Moreau looks like Burt Lancaster?”

“Who’s Burt Lancaster?”

My father winked at me. “Harvey, start a sculpt on Dr. Moreau. No hint of Lancaster.”

“What about Michael York? And the other actors?”

“Go generic on them too. Put extra time into the monsters. Make them badass.”

Harvey took out a flask and filled cups for my father and for Mitch. They toasted each other and I joined in with my can of root beer.

My father stared off into the distance, perhaps at the volleyball match in progress. Even my mother was playing. He turned back to Mitch. “What’s in the pipeline for next year?”

Mitch cleared his throat. “Listen. Are you listening? Because I’d like to throw some horseshoes.”

“No more junk, Mitch. Unless—”

“Unless what?” I realized too late that I should have kept silent. If an adult asked my opinion, I could offer it, but I wasn’t supposed to interrupt.

“Mitch knows what.”

Harvey raised his hand, schoolboy style. “Question. I have a question!”

That got a laugh out of my father. “What?”

“No more junk unless what?”

“Unless,” Mitch said, “it’s junk that sells.”

My father thumped the table. “That’s when we want a whole pile of junk.”

“It’s out there,” Harvey said.

“I’ll have more junk than Redd Fox.”

“*Witch Mountain*,” Mitch said.

“Seth?”

“It’s OK.”

“Yeah, it’s crap,” my father decided.

“It’s Disney,” Mitch pointed out.

“Yeah, Disney crap.”

“*A Boy and His Dog*.”

“Did you see it?”

Mitch mumbled something about having seen the trailer.

“It’s sci-fi,” Harvey said.

“First of all, it’s rated R. Second, the ‘boy’ is a grown man who ends up in a postapocalyptic sperm bank with a tube attached to his dick. You want to make a toy for that?”

Mitch scratched his head. “It’s the same dog from *Brady Bunch*.”

“I want Dorothy Hamill,” my father said.

“Ideal wants her too. Glad-Hand has the skates endorsed by Hamill.”

My father sighed. “We should’ve got that.”

Harvey raised an eyebrow. “Dorothy Hamill must have skated right into your heart.”

“Mine and millions of Americans.”

Mitch shrugged. “The Olympics only come around every four years. We’re talking 1980 before you see Dorothy Hamill anywhere but the Bob Hope special.”

“By then, the eight-year-old girls that want a Dorothy Hamill doll will be eleven.”

“Ready for college,” Harvey added.

“And we’ll all be dead,” my father said.

They cracked up, leaving Mitch stewing, lips pursed, waiting for them to get quiet. He lit another cigarette. “You want a sure thing, produce toys from that Willy Wonka movie.”

“Willy Wonka,” Harvey said.

“That’s what I said.”

“Good idea,” my father said. “Climb into my time machine and set it for 1971. Then we’ll make a stinking pile of money from ‘Willy Wonker’ figures.”

Mitch flicked his cigarette away. The smoke fizzled up from the grass. “*Fiddler on the Roof*,” he said.

“Too ethnic.”

“Reggie Jackson’s not too ethnic? I’m pitching all the ideas, Chuck. What’ve you got?”

“Reggie Jackson is MVP on every team he plays on. Everybody loves him: white kids, black kids, everybody.”

“Nobody makes money off Negro dolls,” Mitch said.

My father had shut his eyes again.

Mitch went right on talking. “In recent years you’ve got Bill Cosby, OJ Simpson, Diana Ross. Kids aren’t buying Negro dolls.”

“You mean white kids aren’t buying them.”

“You want me to say it? White people aren’t buying black dolls. I’m not saying that’s right. But it’s what it is.”

My father opened his eyes. “We’ll give it a shot with Reggie.”

Mitch started to say something but my father held up his hand. “Forget Reggie for now. The deal I’ve been kicking around is *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers*. Fourteen dolls. Extra outfits sold separately. Collect them all!”

“That’s a winner,” Harvey agreed.

“Bullshit,” Mitch said, looking at my father. “Your own kid wouldn’t be caught dead playing with them.”

“They’re not for my own kid, Mitch. It would be a girls’ line. We’ll make playsets and package a 45 with songs from the show.”

“I like it,” Harvey said.

“Oh, Jesus Christ. Why don’t we make figures for *All the President’s Men* while we’re at it?”

My father grinned. “Yeah, let’s.”

“I like that *Rockford Files*,” Harvey said.

In the fading daylight, we threw horseshoes and ate hot dogs. Harvey helped me climb a tree by boosting me up to the branches out of my reach.

The adults didn't talk business. My father had solved a licensing problem in the opposite way of his usual methods. If toy sales sag, licensing buoys them up. But if licensing rights prove unavailable or too costly, go generic. Turn a losing situation into a win-win and make it look easy—that's how you transform yourself from a novelty importer into the head of a leading toy manufacturer in less than five years.

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To kill time before Pete's presentation, I went to a panel called "Beyond Raven." It was one of the few events that morning, and thus crowded, but I found a seat in the back of the meeting room. At the front, three people sat at a long table, each behind a microphone and a glass of water. I expected to hear a nostalgic view of the company's products, a predictable lament about the quality of toys today, and a call to action to bring back the good old days as exemplified by Raven and its visionary president.

What I heard made me sick. They painted my father as a fast-talking con man who backed off on promises and ripped off every competitor. I sat and listened to it all, no one aware of my presence, though it probably wouldn't have made much difference had they known Chuck Carrigan's son was in the audience. Grace Fosster, besides having too many S's in her name, had been an art director for Glad-Hand. She said she wouldn't have worked for Raven. "What would be the point when they were stealing our ideas? We were Raven's R&D: six months after we launched a product, they'd have a knock-off on the shelves. Their start-up costs were zero compared to ours. Carrigan had no ideas. None."

Her colleagues nodded along, chiming in with Raven slams particular to their own specialties. Gerry Habberland, a gaunt man in his early sixties, wore glasses with octagonal frames. His thinning black hair stuck up in tufts behind his ears. In the '70s and '80s he'd been an engineer at Recess Unlimited, the talent behind the electronic board games that put Recess on the map. Now he was their director of design. Gerry took my father to task for being committed to profit over product while outspending rivals to secure licensing

rights from celebrities. No one bothered to explain how my father could be both a big spender and a cheap bastard. I wanted to interrupt, at least mention the contradiction.

The panelist with the least amount of axes to grind was from Mammoth, a new company that made highly-detailed figures of professional athletes. The figures had jointed limbs but weren't really action figures—they cost too much to give to a kid. Adults bought them and put them on a shelf. The Mammoth guy seemed around my age, too young for insider gripes from back in the day. “As a kid,” he began, “I never liked Posables. They were too much like dolls. The clothes fit loosely, the facial expressions were too wholesome. I wanted more menacing figures. What I’ve developed with Mammoth is a direct response to the sterile world of Posables.”

Someone in the front row stood up. “I’d like to take a mammoth shit on your direct response.”

Scattered applause followed, but not nearly enough to suggest a consensus. Flustered, the Mammoth guy fumbled some good-natured retort that got drowned out by the murmuring audience. As the heads stopped craning to see who had made the remark, I confirmed my suspicion. Of course it was my brother.

“And Gerry,” Pete said. “Thirty years is a long time to hold a grudge.”

“What grudge?”

“Mitch DeCoursey outbid you on Tadpoles and you won’t let it go.”

“That’s right, I won’t.”

“The toy industry isn’t Vietnam—it’s pay to play. And if you don’t shut up about it I’m going to stomp on your bifocals.”

A general titter. More turned heads. Grace Fosster rose slightly from behind the table and asked Pete to sit down.

“I’m surprised to see you, Grace.” Pause. “I thought you were dead.” More titter.

As men stood up and began leaving, I pushed my way through rows of chairs to get toward the front, trying to reach Pete before the crowd pounced

on him. Pete had defended our father while I'd sat in silence. I raised my fist in the air and cried out "Let's pump it!" But when I reached the podium, Pete was gone.