fun, for the big show, for the beano, for the main event, to see the people bury some gray cat's nuts and make him crawl and whine and sink in his own terrible grin. But nobody ever follows it up. You just sleep it off until somebody tells you there's going to be another big show.

And then later on you think about it and you say, "What really happened that day? Well, another flak catcher lost his manhood, that's what happened." Hmmmmmm . . . like maybe the bureaucracy isn't so dumb after all . . . All they did was sacrifice one flak catcher, and they've got hundreds, thousands . . . They've got replaceable parts. They threw this sacrifice to you, and you went away pleased with yourself. And even the Flak Catcher himself wasn't losing much. He wasn't losing his manhood. He gave that up a long time ago, the day he became a lifer . . . Just who is fucking over who . . . You did your number and he did his number, and they didn't even have to stop the music . . . The band played on . . . Still—did you see the look on his face? That sucker—