



Reefer Madness . . . a group of dope crazed youths (top) try to pawn off a reefer on a new victim, but later learn (bottom) that the jig is up when the police raid their den of madness.

## Incurable insanity

Review by Roy Baldwin

Lock on your wigs and let the air out of your shoes, fellow bozos. There's a pungent odor of surrealism to the film showing at the Hollywood & Vine Theaters, and coming to Sheldon Art Gallery February 3 and 4.

*Martian Space Party*, a visual medley of tunes from the Firesign Theatre's latest album, stars the gang in a performance of the National Surrealist Light Peoples' Party convention (NSLPP) on Monster Island. The NSLPP is a multitude of crawly things ("We gotta stop eatin' each other!") plus a few humans left over from earth. George (One Organism, One Vote) Papoon wins the nomination with the slogan, "Not Insane."

Papoon may or may not be a sly satire of George McGovern.

If the theme of *Martian Space Party* is "Not Insane," the theme of *Reefer Madness* has to be the opposite. The flick is vintage 1936 "For Adults Only." It's been revived by New Line Cinema and is being shown at hip places around the United States. It's great.

The prologue, which seems to run forever, grimly warns that smokers of the Dread Weed are first thrown into "fits of uncontrollable laughter"—at which point the audience laughs uncontrollably—leading inevitably to "incurable insanity." By then, members of the audience have fallen out of their chairs.

And it gets better. A hatchet-faced high school principal, who could be Margaret ("Wicked Witch of the West") Hamilton's brother, harangues a meeting of stoned-looking parents about the dangers of the dread scourge. One puff of the weed sends girls panting into the arms of total strangers, turns guys into sexual and criminal dervishes and transforms sunny, crew-cut youngsters into hollow-eyed, stumbling addicts.

Although the principal demands compulsory education as to the "real facts" about marijuana, what follows has nothing to do with reality. The principal flashes the audience back to the story of local high school kids caught by the scourge. There is ace tennis player Bill, a dead ringer for Johnny Carson, and his girl Mary Lane.

Jack, the local pusher, suffers from acute, perpetual munchies. His accomplices, Mae and Blanche, lure the kids to wild parties at their apartment.

With the carryings-on, it's not hard to see why older folks have the notions they do about dope. The movie abounds in stupidity.

It's bad enough that the killer weed has such a weird effect on the addict, but the kids come unglued after one toke and commit all manners of heinous crimes—hit-and-run accidents, sexual depravity, murder, insanity and playing the piano too fast.

What's really grating is that this exploitation is shoveled out as truth. No one ever bothered to find out the "real facts" about anything.

*Reefer Madness* is a must, both because it's a gas and because it provides real insights into the misinformation that has shaped this country's attitudes toward drugs. Totally insane.

## The mad world of 'Mad'

bart  
becker  
bells  
letters

A lot of funny stuff used to happen in the pages of *Mad* magazine. And, according to *The Mad World of William M. Gaines*, a lot of equally funny stuff used to happen in its offices.

Author Frank Jacobs has pulled a couple bushel baskets of amusing anecdotes about the millionaire publisher, and "the usual gang of idiots," (as the *Mad* contributors are described in each issue,) into a biography amusing as *Mad* itself used to be.

Jacobs successfully describes *Mad's* role in America in one paragraph:

"Because it contains so many pictures, many people call it a comic. Because it appeals to so many youngsters, many people think it is not fit reading for adults. Because it assails both political fringes, it is damned by both of them. Because it attacks sacred institutions, it is called un-American. Because it refuses to print pornography, it is called square. Because it hits everything, it is accused of lacking a point of view.

What Jacobs doesn't point out is that the sacred institutions *Mad* attacks are no longer sacred. The humor has escaped from articles such as "The Lighter Side of Peace Marches." In short, the topical humor that once made *Mad* marked is no longer topical.

Although Jacobs and Gaines would deny it, *Mad* in 1972 was a gutless jokebook. In its prime it would offend everyone, as Jacobs points out. Now it is offensive only because it's boring.

But a biography is to capture those past moments. The *Mad World of William M. Gaines* does this admirably.

Gaines always has run his life and his business by his own rule. He owns a couple shirts, a couple sportcoats, his iron-gray hair falls to his shoulders and his untrimmed silver beard hides that fact that he wears no tie.

He began his reign in the publishing business in the early 1950s with a line of horror comics. *The Vault of Horror*, and *Weird Fantasy* were two titles that signaled a new age in comic book illustration.

But in the mid-50s, a witch hunt against the forces of evil and Communism found Gaines' comics an easy target. By 1956 the horror comic didn't exist.

But Gaines had *Mad*. With it he cut a swath of irreverency through the '50s and '60s.

Jacobs, who has worked off and on for *Mad* for 15 years, has rubbed enough shoulders to put together a book that captures the magazine's spirit. From it, a lot of information can be gleaned, most importantly:

- Gaines is a crazy person. Luckily he is the boss of a place where crazy people meet.
- He is *Mad's* biggest fan. It regularly reduces him to uncontrollable laughter.
- He is a practicing atheist.
- He is one of a kind.

