

Issue Seven

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Morrigan's War



Chris Grant '90

EMPIRES

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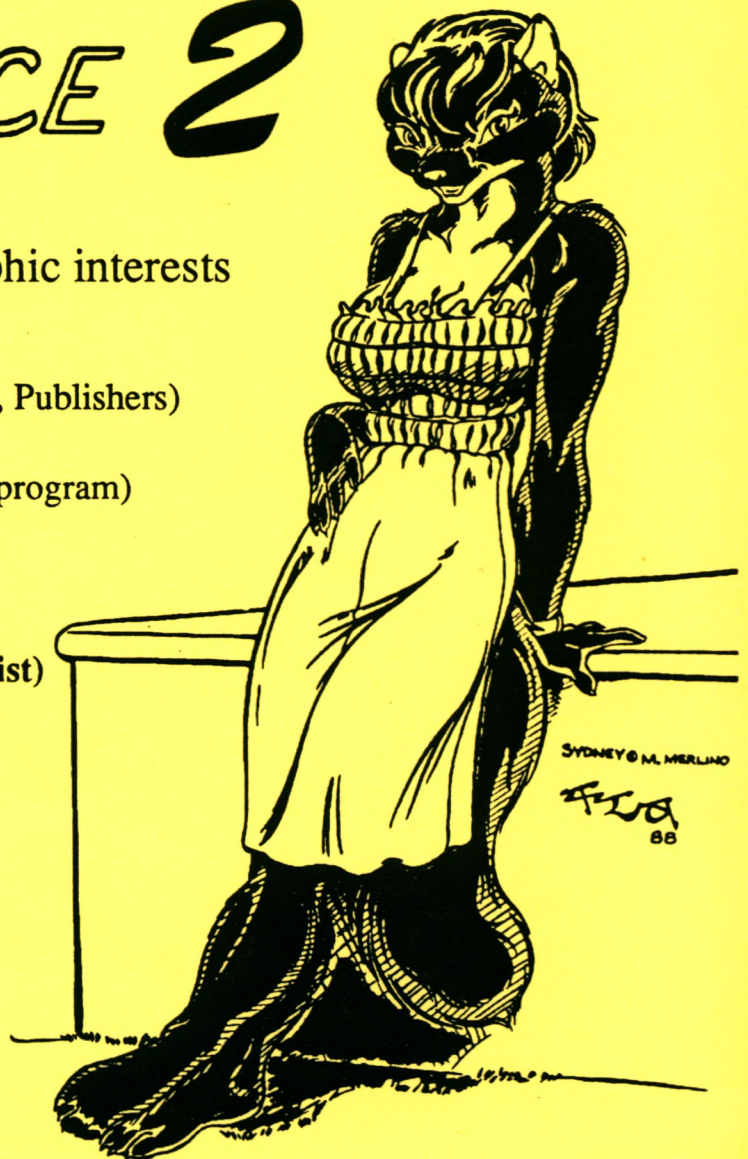
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YARF! is sold on a per-issue rather than a calendar basis.

Subscriptions are available at the following rates:

8 issues, \$32.00

Single issues are at cover price. Prices include postage, except overseas (call or write for info).

Make checks payable to YARF!.

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Flaming Hairballs ●●●●●●●●●●

Editorial ramblings and letters of comment from us to you and from you to us.

"What," you may ask, "is going on here? YARF! looks... different!"

Absolutely correct. YARF!, after six issues of basically identical format and layout, is getting a subtle facelift. What prompted this was a good look at some of the other fanzines which were available at the San Diego Comic Con. When a publisher picks up a magazine or book, it's natural to look at exactly what is being done, how well it works, and *why* it works. And we are no exception.

Friends, there is some good stuff out there. Closed-membership Amateur Press Associations ("APA's"), small-circulation fanzines, portfolios, and larger-circulation magazines... all were well-represented. All interests and levels of quality could be found, and it was a delightful chore to go through them all.

It was also a learning experience. After critiquing the other publications, we inevitably turned the same jaundiced eye to our own. You hold the results in your hands.

As with anything, we welcome your comments on the changes here, as well as any suggestions you may have.

We have some long strips, stories, and articles this time around. Because of this, we've expanded this issue by a few pages... enjoy 'em!

Also, this issue debuts a new contributor, Dave Kuhn. Dave is a cartoonist/ animator from Southern California whom we met at the San Diego Comic Con this year.

Dave has a great deal of talent, and we welcome him to YARF!'s pages.

Enough rambling. Enjoy this issue, and we'll see you in another 45 days!

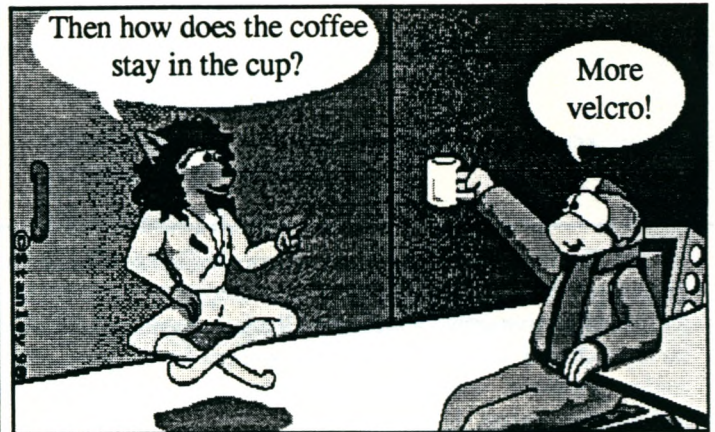
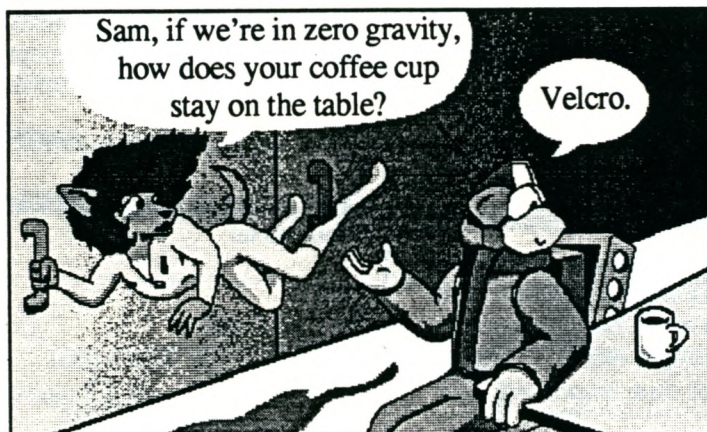
DEADLINES...DEADLINES...DEADLINES...

You'd think that for just *one* issue we could give it a rest, and not whine about deadlines... but NOOOOOO...

- Issue 8, October 20, 1990
- Issue 9 (first \$4.00 issue), December 1, 1990
- Issue 10, January 12, 1991
- Issue 11, February 23, 1991
- Issue 12, April 6, 1991



Freefall by Mark Stanley





omw
DaveKuhn '90

Patten's Pontifications

Book Review: Skywater

Reviewed by Fred Patten

Skywater, by Melinda Worth Popham. St. Paul, Minn., Graywolf Press, May 1990, 206 pages, \$17.95; ISBN 1-55597-127-X.

Skywater is a superb nature novel in the tradition of Jack London's Call of the Wild. It follows a band of coyotes who are driven by the pollution of the ground water from their home territory in the Sonora desert near Yuma, Arizona. The coyotes are introduced through the eyes of an old retired couple, Albert and Hallie Ryder, who give them names based on brand products: Dinty Moore, Kodak, Boyardee, and the like. The novel uses these for convenience, but makes it clear that this is a deliberate human convention. The coyotes' own awareness of their identities is more basic: The leader, the loyal follower, the challenger, the two females, the three-legged (injured) one, etc. The coyotes are anthropomorphized as little as possible, mostly just to give them a common goal — to search for the legendary Skywater, the home of all waters — and an awareness that it is to their mutual advantage to seek this goal together, instead of living as loners as coyotes usually do.

Popham convincingly puts the reader into a coyote's mind, to see and think and be aware as a real coyote. The small amount of anthropomorphization is consistent with native American psychologies and beliefs. The leader, Brand X, thinks of the Moon in terms of his dead father's white eye; the coyotes superstitiously regard undrinkable seawater as reserved for the spirits of their ancestors. But in general, Skywater presents the coyotes realistically rather than humanizing them to the extent, say, of Felix Salten's Bambi.

The story takes a group of scruffy, look-alike, non-talking animals and succeeds in making each of them sharply individualized, capable of nonverbal communication, and sympathetic. It also realistically presents the dangers faced by modern Southwestern wildlife: crossing busy highways, the large Yuma Proving Ground weapons test range, the inevitable result when large predators lose their fear of humans and come raiding for food in human communities. Popham shows that there are many people who are seriously concerned with wildlife preservation who nevertheless feel that coyotes are so prolific and are a menace to genuinely Endangered Species that they need to be cut back. It is because she presents all the ecological arguments in such an objective manner, and still comes out strongly in favor of the coyotes, that the "moon-callers" stand out as such sympathetic characters. And it is because this is primarily an adventure novel and only secondarily an educational tract that readers will enjoy it whether they care about the Message or not. Seven coyotes against modern

human civilization — do they really have a chance? Read Skywater and find out.

Skywater is realistic enough that it may not be to the taste of those who prefer anthropomorphs who dress, talk, and act just like regular humans in animal costumes. Those who are intrigued by characters who mix their species' individual traits with human-level intelligence will enjoy Skywater — and may find it a valuable reference for constructing coyotid Furry characters.

Two good books by Baen...

Book Review: Shaman

Reviewed by Fred Patten

Shaman, by Sandra Miesel. New York, Baen Books, October 1989, 306 pages, \$3.50, ISBN 0-671-69844-3.

About half of Shaman does not have any anthropomorphic characters, but it is a very good novel that you should enjoy anyhow. Riya LaGarde is an unhappy citizen in an overly regimented and monitored future. She has dreams in which her consciousness visits parallel worlds, some better and some worse. Her mind is lured to an Earth that has trained ESP powers, and which has bioengineered otters to partnership with humanity. Riya becomes a close friend of Lute, an otter technician, and visits him often. There is a lengthy scene in which she is invited to the otter's coastal community to join one of their festivals. Riya remains in mental contact with Lute when she must return to her own world, and the two work together to save her from PSI, the "thought police".

Miesel extrapolates upon the otter's natural playfulness and gregariousness to give her intelligent otter people a lively and impish personality, which is just as serious and practical as the drably-enforced "responsibility" of Riya's society. The otters' own communal life-style is patterned after the extended families of the Polynesians.

Book Review: Cathouse

Reviewed by Fred Patten

Cathouse, by Dean Ing. New York, Baen Books, May 1990, 247 pages, \$3.95, ISBN 0-671-69872-9

Cathouse consists of two novellas that were originally published in Baen's The Man-Kzin Wars (June 1988) and Man-

Kzin Wars II (August 1989). If you have those, you don't need this. These are shared-world stories, set in Larry Niven's Known Universe. Niven established in his stories that mankind has repeatedly beaten the cat-like Kzinti in a series of violent space wars, but the instinctively warlike Kzinti won't give up. In this new series, other writers are describing the events of the Fourth Man-Kzin War. Cathouse is fully understandable on its own, and Ing is more successful than some writers in depicting the Kzin as intriguing Furry anthropomorphs rather than just a savage alien enemy.

Carroll Locklear is a human scholar captured by a small Kzinti warship when the war breaks out. He is dumped on an unexplored planet for temporary safekeeping. Locklear discovers that the planet is actually a base of the Outsiders, mysterious aliens whom nobody has ever seen but who left their artifacts throughout the galaxy. The world is a prehistoric zoo, with specimens in suspended animation from both Earth and the Kzin homeworld of 40,000 years ago.

In the first story, Locklear has to awaken the ancient Kzin, reach an understanding with them, and manipulate ancient-modern Kzin rivalries to his advantage to gain his freedom. In the second story, Locklear is having his own problems with the Neanderthals whom he revives in the Earth biosphere, but these fade to insignificance when human space-navy mutineers come to the planet. Locklear has to return to the Kzin biosphere and get involved in their deadly politics again to win their help against the modern humans, who are the most viciously murderous of all.

Ing shows the Kzin as tiger-like anthropomorphs with an intelligence that has evolved from feline traits. A key story development is the manner in which Locklear and some of the Kzin use their intelligence to rise above their conflicting instincts for their mutual advantage.

(Dean Ing's Cathouse is in no way related to Michael Peak's Cat House, reviewed in our second issue.)

• • •

Book Review: Ratha and Thistle-Chaser

Reviewed by Fred Patten

Ratha and Thistle-chaser, by Clare Bell. New York, McElderry Books, April 1990, 232 pages, \$14.95; ISBN 0-689-50462-4.

Bell's Ratha series (Ratha's Creature, 1983; Clan Ground, 1984) is set twenty-five million years in Earth's past. Hominids have not yet appeared, but a clan of large, cougar-like cats have evolved to intelligence. They have developed a language and a tribal society, and they have learned how to herd primitive deer and horses for a permanent food supply. The cats protect them from other predators, and take care that their own appetites do not outmatch their herd's

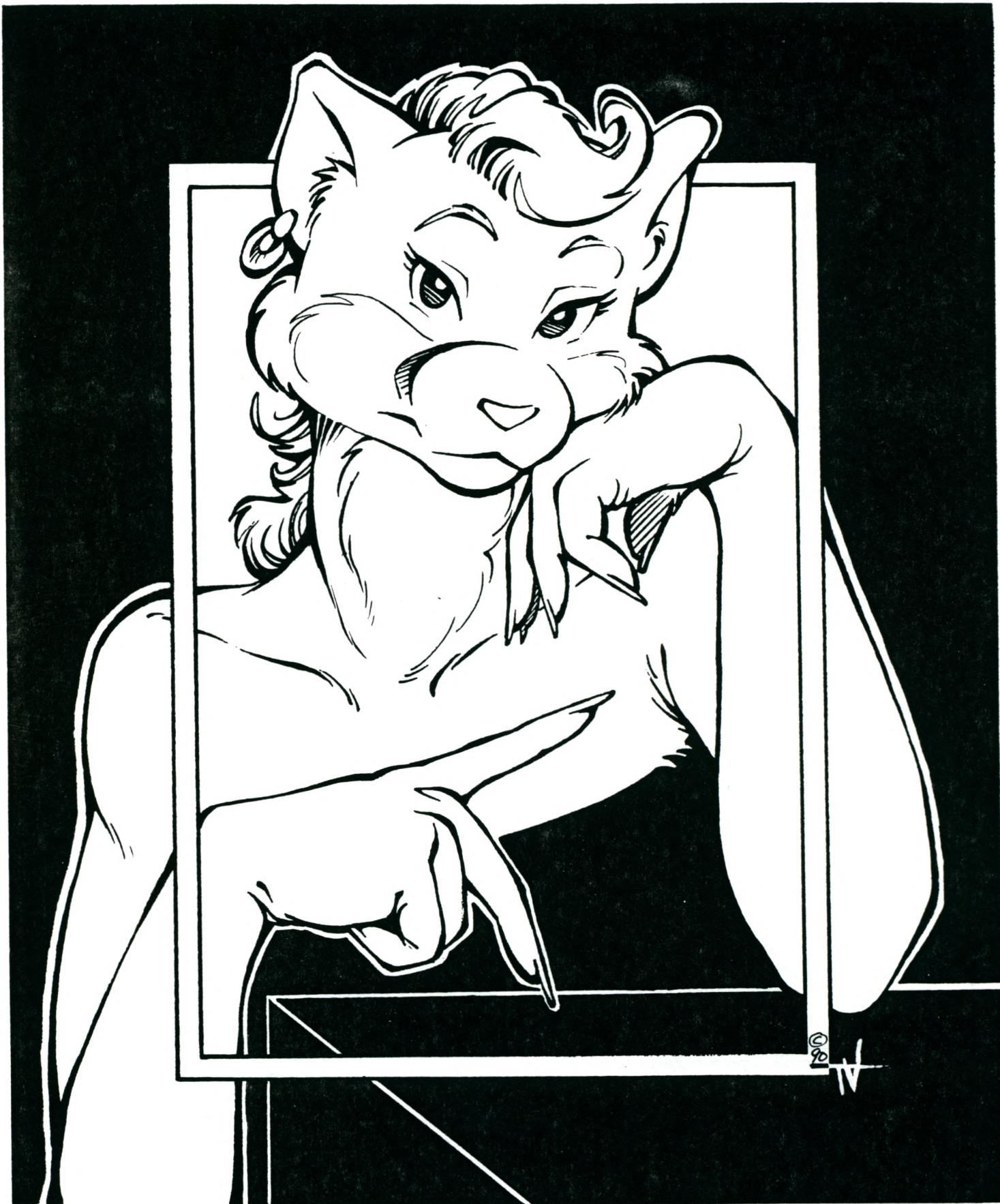
breeding powers. However, the clan is far outnumbered by hostile wild felines, some of which are unintelligent and some of which are equally smart but unwilling to restrain their gluttony and would slaughter the whole herd for an immediate feast. Also, the cats of the clan have noticed that the offspring of mating within the clan are always intelligent, whereas the cubs of matings between themselves and wild cats may or may not be intelligent.

Ratha is introduced in Ratha's Creature as an adventurous adolescent who dares to question the traditions and beliefs of the clan. She is driven out to become an outcast. During her wanderings before she returns to the clan, she mates with an Un-Named cat; but when her cubs are apparently unintelligent, she sorrowfully abandons them. By the conclusion of the first novel, Ratha is the new leader of the clan of the Named, and the adventures in Clan Ground confirm her in this position.

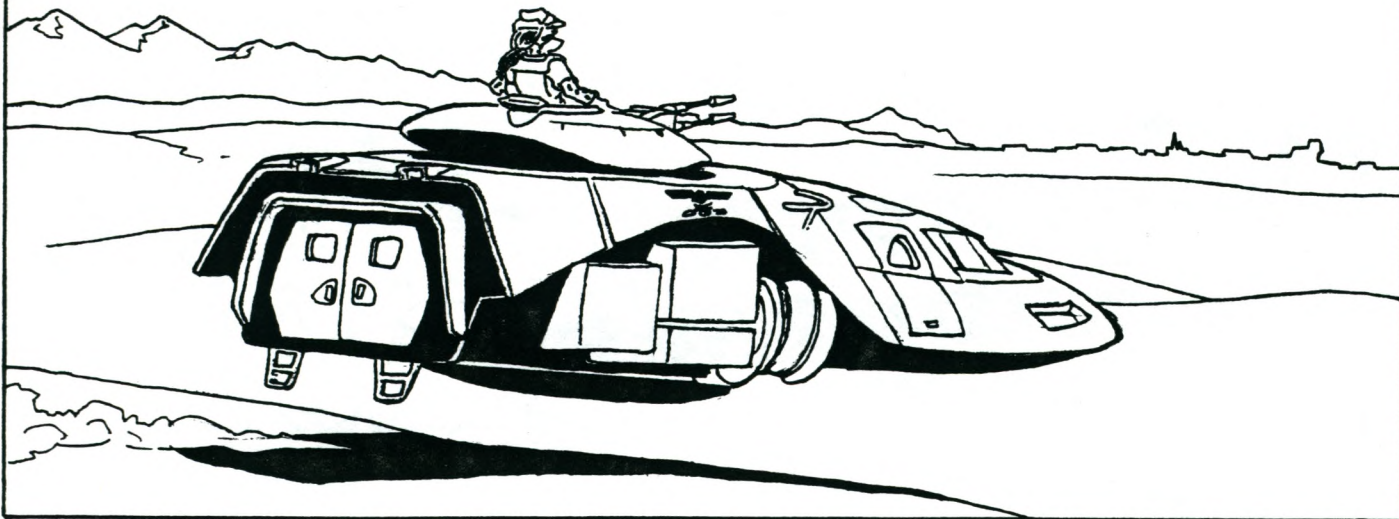
Ratha and Thistle-chaser is set three years after the first novel and two years after the second. It tells two parallel stories. One is of a crippled, solitary young cat who is obviously one of Ratha's abandoned cubs. The second is of the clan, forced by a drought to search for a new pasture for the herdbeasts, who discover the seacoast. Ratha's daughter has already staked out her lonely home here, surviving on shellfish and fish trapped in tidal pools. The wild cat's intelligence is erratic, but to what extent is this actual feeble-mindedness and to what extent is it due to growing up as a truly feral child? Whatever the reason, is she an equal of the clan? Intelligence aside, what psychological and emotional scars does she bear that might prevent her friendly adoption by the clan? And can Ratha, now accustomed to leadership, afford to acknowledge that she made a mistake? Ratha's two old clan friends, Thakur and Fessran, watch with growing unease as stubbornness and misunderstandings on both sides appear to lead toward an unavoidable and tragic conflict.

Bell's intelligent cats are attractive creatures. They are plausibly anthropomorphized, with consciousness laid over their feline attributes rather than replacing them. In fact, it is difficult to read these books without being subtly depressed because Ratha's people are not alive today — i.e., their fight for survival as told in these stories must have ultimately failed.

If you have read the first two novels, you will enjoy this one. If you have not, you should start with Ratha's Creature. In addition to giving the full background of Ratha and her cubs, and of the clan, it is a more satisfying story. Ratha's actions seem more like her own decisions. In Ratha and Thistle-chaser, there is more of a feeling of the author's manipulation of the story. It soon becomes clear that Ratha and Thistle-chaser are going to stubbornly avoid listening to reason and refuse to see each other until a Dramatic Confrontation at the climax of the novel. It is well-handled when it comes, but it is expected. ☺



LATE AFTERNOON --- AND AN IMPERIAL FIELD COMMAND TRUCK RACES FOR THE SMALL DESERT VILLAGE OF TEBESSA



EMPIRES

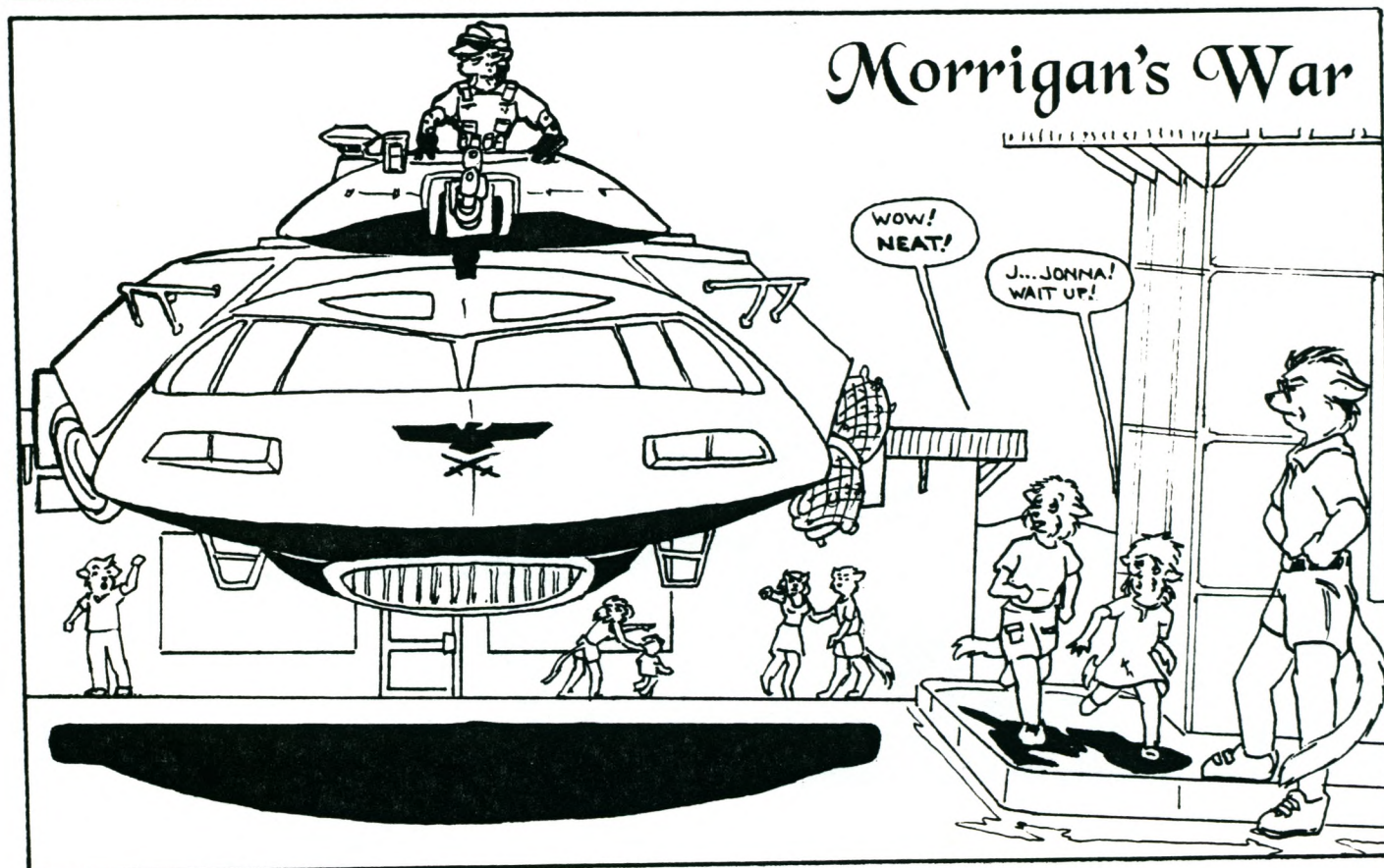
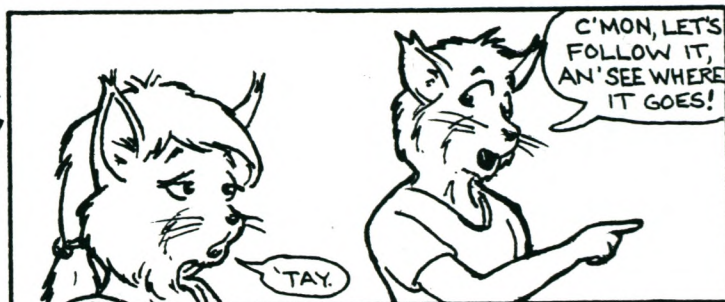
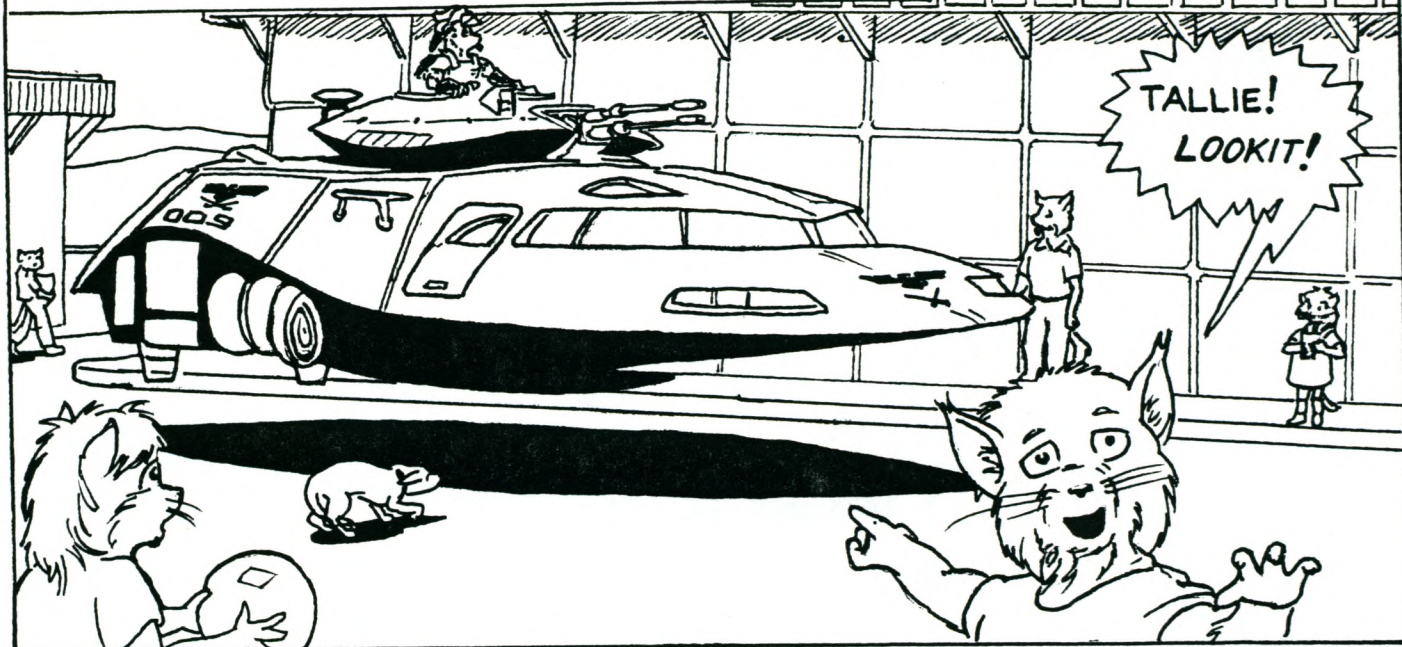
STORY, PENCILS : CHRIS GRANT • INKING : ERIC BLUMRICH • LETTERING : LANCE RUND

THE IMPERIAL COMMANDER IS CAPTAIN LEFAYETTE MORRIGAN --- AND THE FOCUS OF HER ATTENTION IS TEBESSA'S POWERFUL COMM-STATION.



...WHICH SHOULD BE POWERFUL ENOUGH TO KEEP ME IN CONTACT WITH MY COMPANY, **WITHOUT** GIVING AWAY RELEVANT LOCATIONS OF MYSELF, OR OUR SATELLITES...

AT 1720, MORRIGAN'S TRUCK ENTERS THE TOWN OF TEBESSA.



DAMMIT! WHERE'S OUR PEOPLE? I DISPATCHED FIRST PLATOON HERE HOURS AGO! SGT. ALPEN, WHAT'S THE REPORT?



IF L'TENANT CH'KAIRE FOLLOWS HIS USUAL PROCEDURES, HE'S CONSOLIDATED HIS PLATOON AT THE CITY GOVERNMENT CENTRE



WONDERFUL...

...TAKE ME TO MY IDIOT FIRST PLATOON LEADER.



CH'KAIRE, THAT JACKASS. PUTS POLITICAL OBJECTIVES BEFORE MILITARY ONES. HE SHOULD HAVE SCoured THE CITY AND CHECKED FOR INSURGENTS...



... YES, TAKING THE CAPITOL IS IMPORTANT...IT DISRUPTS ORGANIZATION AND HURTS MORALE. BUT THE OBJECTIVE MEANS NOTHING IF IT IS NOT EXPLOITED...



THERE COULD BE SNIPERS, RESISTANCE GROUPS, ENEMY SYMPATHISERS... EVEN ENEMY TROOPS, HIDING BEHIND THE LINES, AS HAS BEEN REPORTED. THIS TOWN NEEDS TO BE SHAKEN DOWN...AND LIEUTENANT CH'KAIRE KNOCKED ON HIS HEAD.

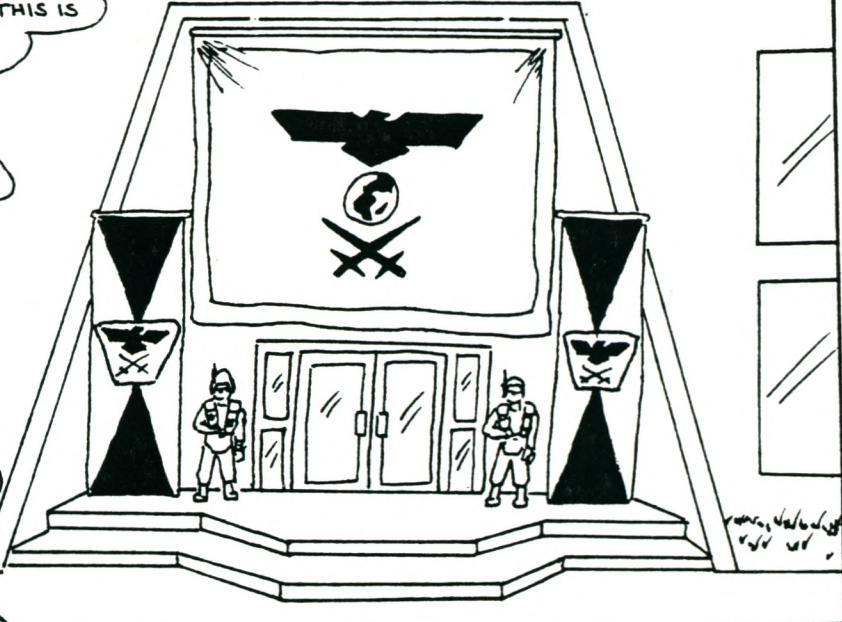


THE NAV-COMPUTER ON THE TRUCK GUIDES SGT. ALPEN TO THE CITY GOVERNMENT BUILDING

SIGH SERGEANT, TAKE A GOOD LOOK. THIS IS WHAT YOU GET WHEN YOU PUT POLITICAL SOLDIERS IN CHARGE OF COMBAT TROOPS...

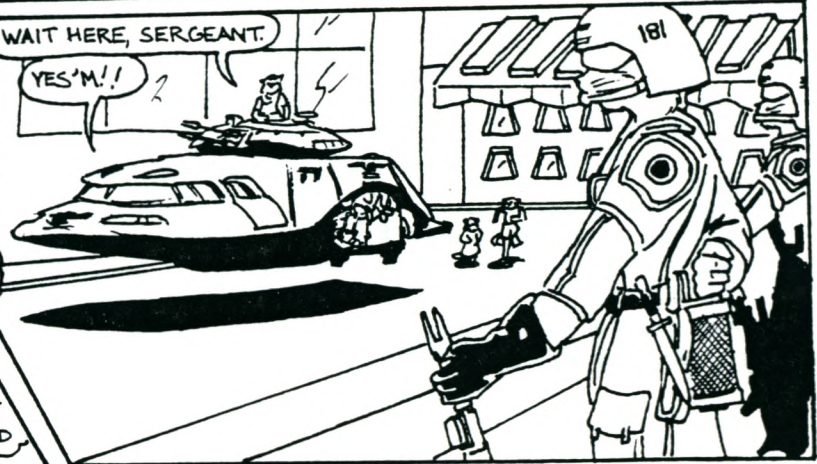
LOTS OF GAUDY SPLASH WITH NO FUNCTION WHATSOEVER.

PAUGH!
HOW PRETTY.



WAIT HERE, SERGEANT.

YES'M!!



I OUGHTA BUST CH'KAIRE FOR NOT FOLLOWING PROCEDURE... BUT I NEED MY EXPERIENCED LEADERS

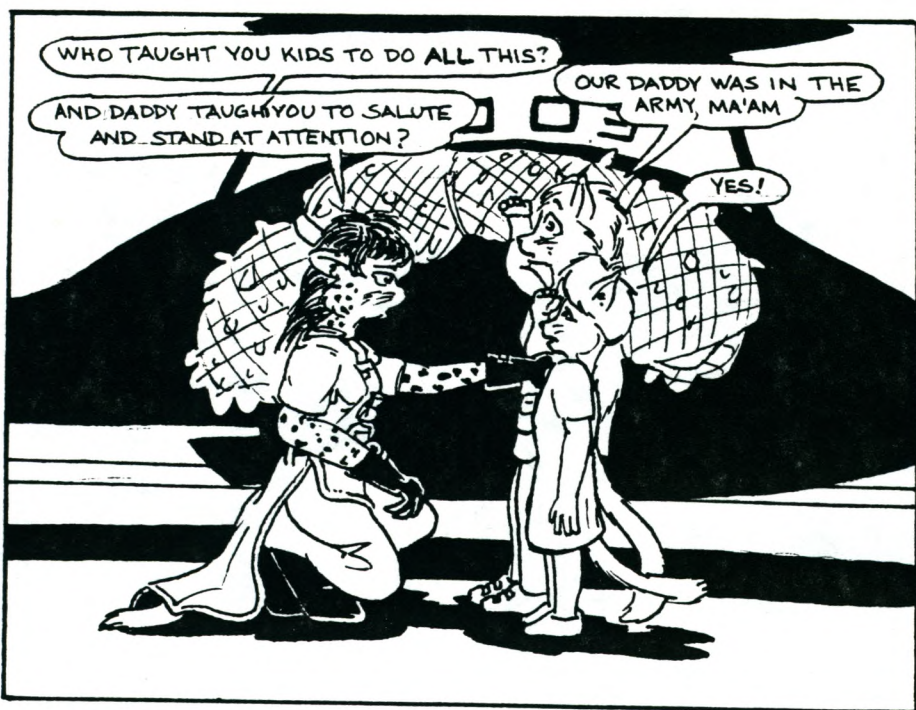
OHH!
LOOKIT!

SCARE!



HMM?





OUTSTANDING! HERE, JONNA. YOU CAN HAVE THIS. I HAVE IMPORTANT WORK TO DO NOW, BUT IF YOU SEE ME HERE TOMORROW, I'LL TALK WITH YOU BOTH.

ALL RIGHT!
I MEAN --
YES, MA'AM!

YES,
MA'AM!



WELL, WELL... WHAT HAVE WE HERE? TWO SOLDIERS OF THE IRRYKANOI EMPIRE?

NAHHH...
COULDN'T BE.

TOO DAMN
PRETTY.



CORPORAL...
HOW FAR AWAY
CAN A PAIR OF
HIGHLY POL-
ISHED BOOTS
BE SEEN, USING
A TYPICAL
NIGHT SIGHT?

FOUR THOUSAND
METERS, MA'AM.

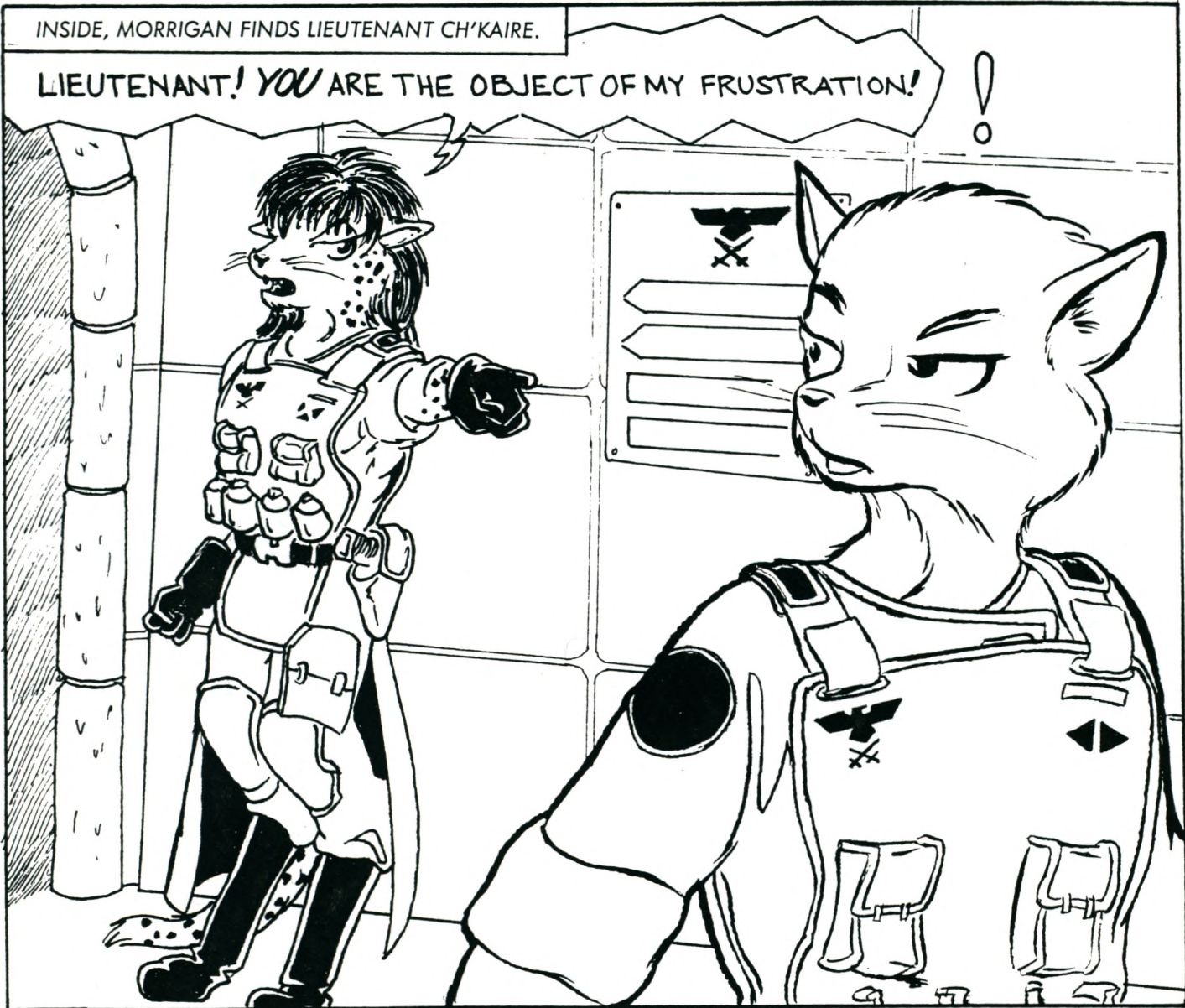


MMM. YES. AND NOW, PRIVATE,
WHAT IS THE STANDARD RANGE
OF ENGAGEMENT FOR A CENTRAL-
MOUNTED ARTILLERY RIFLE?



UHH...
FOUR
THOUSAND
METERS,
MA'AM.







YOU, LIEUTENANT, DO NOT EVEN MAKE A GOOD "BRAINLESS MINION".

HOW MANY TROOPS DO YOU HAVE WITH YOU?

SEVENTY...

... DOES THE CAPTAIN WISH A REVIEW?



DON'T GET STUPID WITH ME, CH'KAIRE. WHERE IS YOUR PLATOON?

CLAP!

THE STARPORT...

...MA'AM.



THE... STARPORT.

HOW QUAIN. NOW, LIEUTENANT, WOULD YOU TELL ME...

WHY THE EMPIRE'S SOLDIERS ARE LOUNGING AT A STARPORT IN AN UNSECURED AREA?



SECURING THE STARPORT.

PREP FOR ARRIVAL OF A GROUP FROM THE SHIP...

...MA'AM



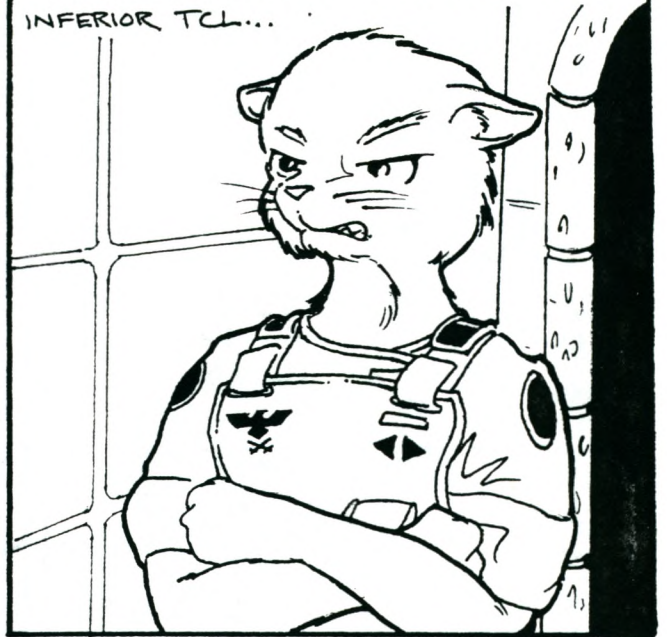
"A GROUP FROM THE SHIP". WELL, A WHOLE LOT OF SHIT JUST CLARIFIED ITSELF.

I GO CHASING ABOUT LITTLE "PROBLEMS" LEFT BEHIND BY OUR ILLUSTRIOUS FIELD-MARSHALL...

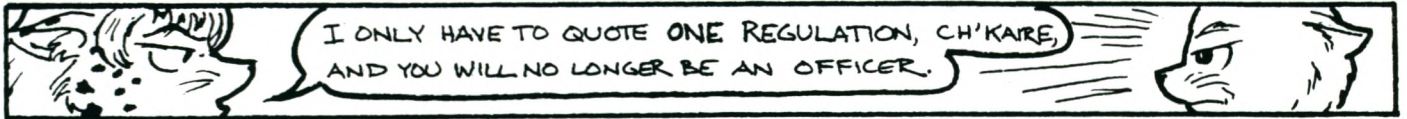
WHILE WITH YOUR BANNERS, POLISHED BOOTS,
AND CEREMONY, YOU KISS ASS, WHILE THE
FRINGEWORLDER BITCH IS'NT THERE. 'COURSE,
THAT'S BECAUSE NOBODY TOLD HER, BUT WHO
CARES?



"BUT HERE'S LIEUTENANT CH'KAIRE... PLAIN
COAT, PLANTIGRADE... A TRUE IMPERIAL,
CHAFING UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF AN
INFERIOR TCL..."



I ONLY HAVE TO QUOTE ONE REGULATION, CH'KAIRE,
AND YOU WILL NO LONGER BE AN OFFICER.



HOWEVER, I AM NOT THAT PETTY. NOR DO I CONSIDER
YOU A THREAT. A CHANGE IN ATTITUDE WOULD DO YOU GOOD,
LIEUTENANT. I SHALL OBSERVE YOU FOR A WHILG. FOR NOW,
HOWEVER... MORE PRESSING NEEDS ARE CALLING.



THE SECURITY WITHIN THIS CITY. WHAT YOU SHOULD HAVE DONE BY NOW, AND WILL, ACCORDING TO STANDARD OCCUPATION PLAN BETA-FOUR.

IMPLEMENT, LIEUTENANT!

OF COURSE, MA'AM.

BITCH...

INCOMPETENT.

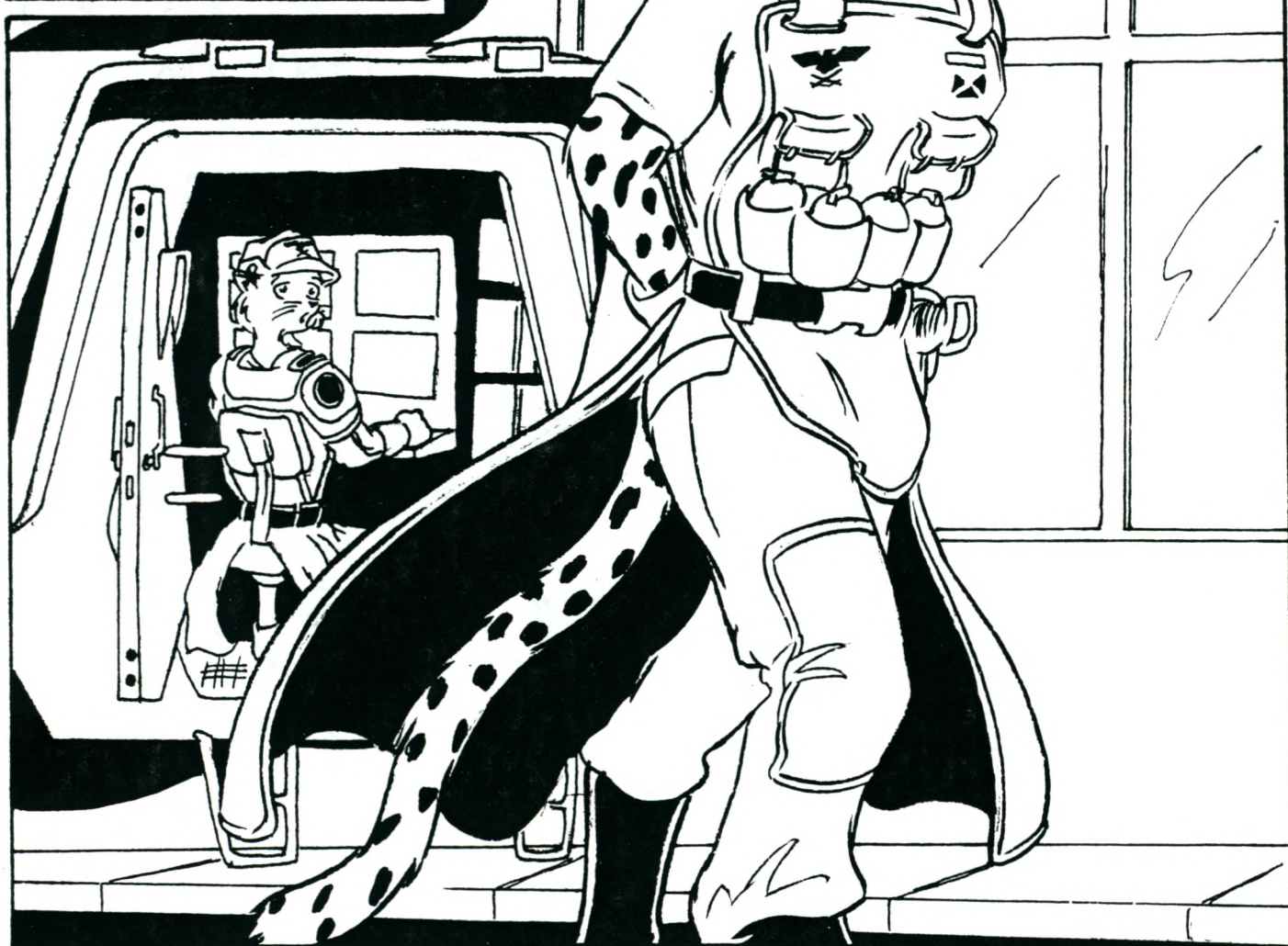
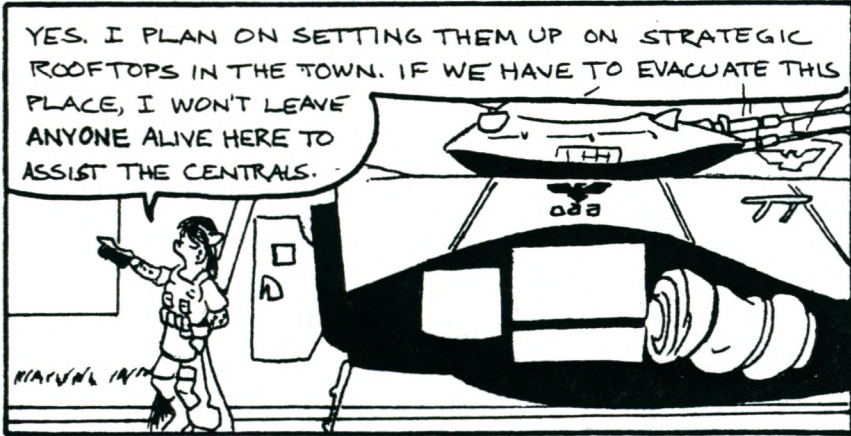
MOMENTS LATER...

SERGEANT ALPEN... CONTACT THE OP-CENT. INFORM THEM I WILL BE MAKING MY HEADQUARTERS HERE.

WHILE YOU'RE AT IT, REQUISITION FOUR DRUMS OF KM-17.

YES'M...

UHM... KM-17? NERVE GAS?



The

Ace

of

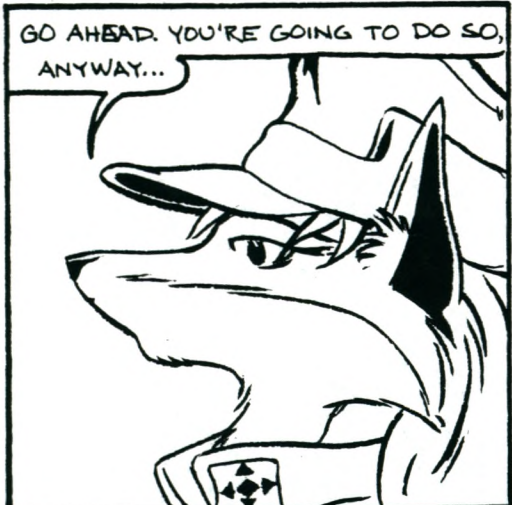
Spades

CORPORAL BARONA!

I WAS WONDERING IF I
COULD ASK A...

...A PERSONAL QUESTION?



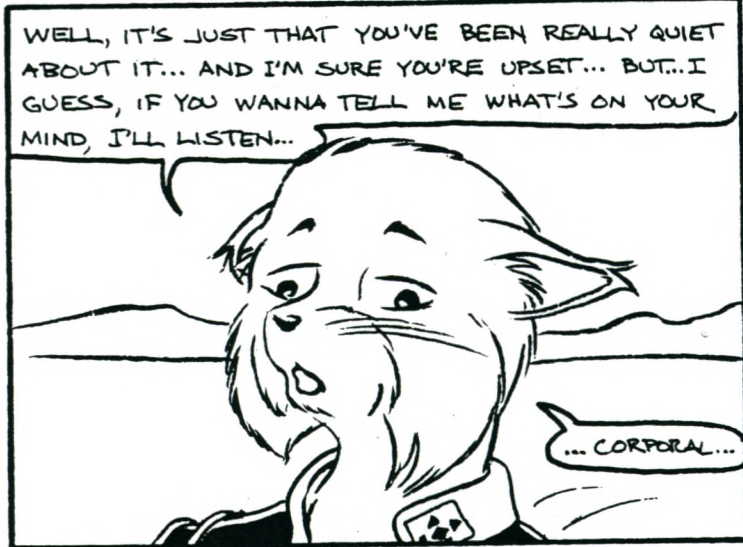


GO AHEAD. YOU'RE GOING TO DO SO, ANYWAY...



UHH... YEAH... IT'S JUST THAT... WHAT YOU TOLD ME ABOUT THE REST OF THE COMPANY, BEING LIKE FAMILY AND ALL...

YEAH...



WELL, IT'S JUST THAT YOU'VE BEEN REALLY QUIET ABOUT IT... AND I'M SURE YOU'RE UPSET... BUT... I GUESS, IF YOU WANNA TELL ME WHAT'S ON YOUR MIND, I'LL LISTEN...

... CORPORAL...



HEH... I UNDERSTAND, TOMAC. THANKS, BUT EMOTIONS LIKE THAT ARE... PRIVATE MATTERS WITH ME.



OH...

... SORRY

FORGET IT.

CALL NILE, SARGEANT

13

ACE OF SPADES



CORPORAL! HOW SOON COULD WE BE TRAVEL-READY?

I GOT THE WATER CANS FILLED. I NEED A FEW MINUTES TO SECURE THEM, THEN WE'LL BE MOBILE. WE GOIN' SOMEWHERE?



YES. WE HEARD SOMETHING ON THE COMMO... ONE OF OUR UNITS IS IN TROUBLE BY THE RIVER.



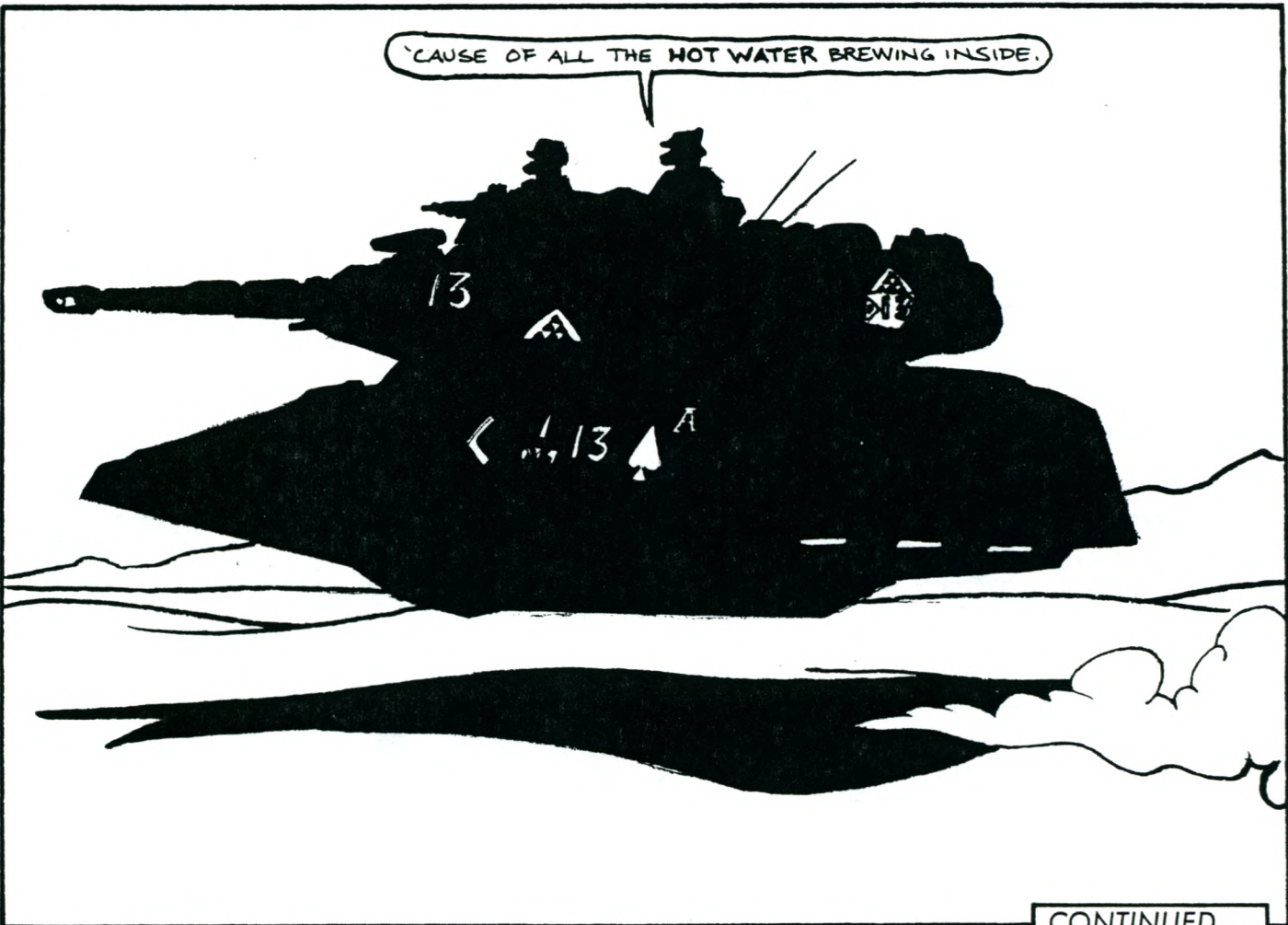
THEN WE BETTER GET MOVING, SIR. TOMAC, GIMME A HAND WITH THIS STUFF. OOMPFF!!

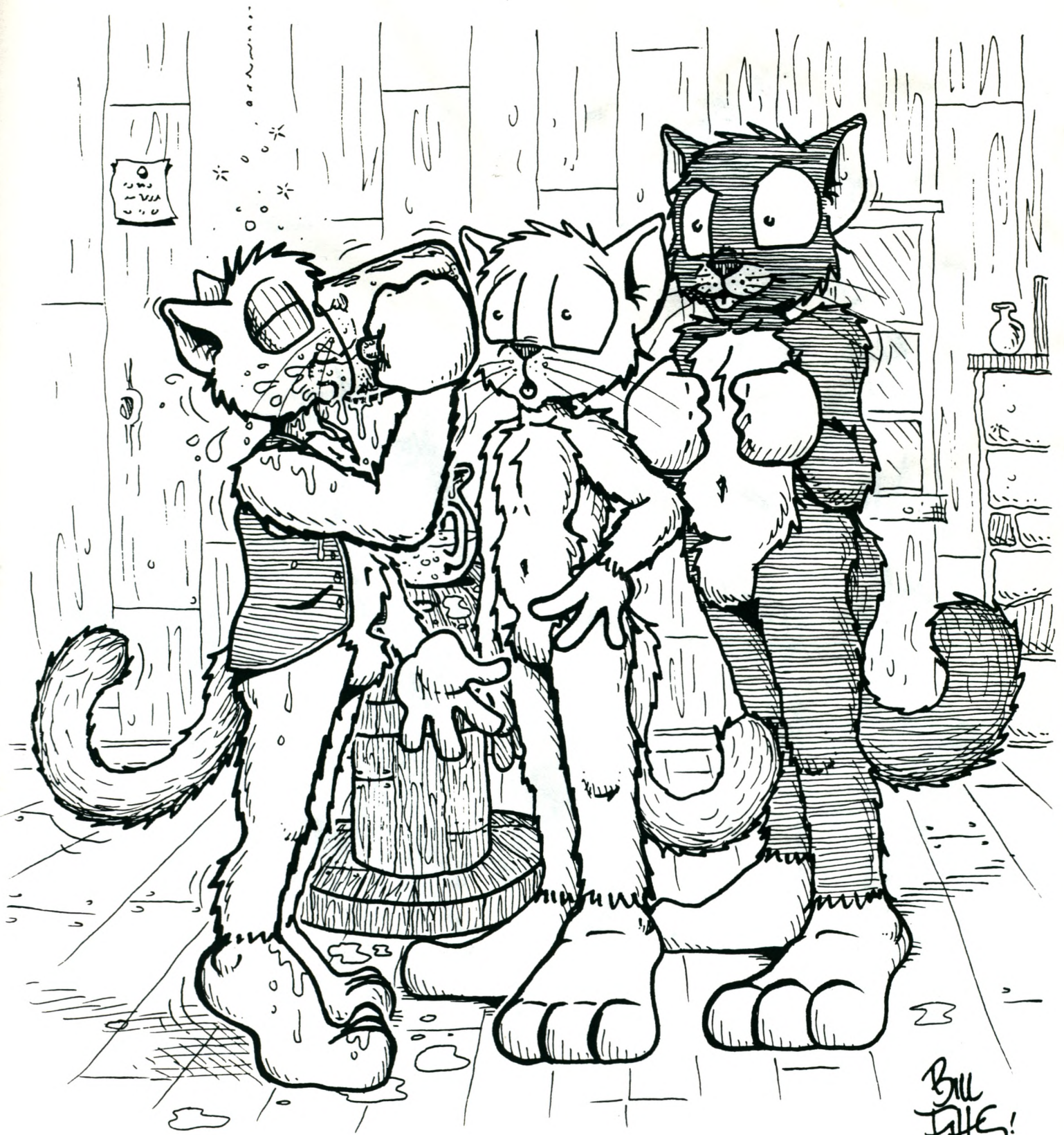
THE RIVER?

WE CAN'T STAY HERE TOO LONG, ANYWAY. SO WE'RE GOING TO CHECK IT OUT. IF IT IS, INDEED, ONE OF OURS WE'LL HELP THEM OUT.









Bill
Tales!

"CHUGALUG"



A GIFT OF FIRE, A GIFT OF BLOOD

PART 3

by Watts Martin
Illustrated by Zjonna

*Because these wings are no longer wings to fly
But merely fans to beat the air
The air which is now thoroughly small and dry
Smaller and dryer than the will
Teach us to care and not to care
Teach us to sit still.*

—T.S. Eliot, "Ash Wednesday"

"It is *not* a stupid holiday. Where's your patriotism?" Dahlu's voice had what Mika thought of as her "dipped" edge to it. It was a particular type of testiness that only manifested itself when she was trying to make a fabulously complicated dip for her fabulously complicated party platters.

"That's a complex question. I could have patriotism for the Empire, or just for Rionar, or both. Or both, but with different feelings. Or—"

"All right, it's a stupid holiday. Shut up and taste this." She held out a spoon with a small amount of thick, opaque orangish goo at its tip. Mika paused at his task of meat-slicing, sniffed it suspiciously, licked it, then regarded the spoon dubiously.

"What's it supposed to go with?"

"Cold cuts rolled around cheese."

"We're getting specialized. That'd probably taste pretty good with that, though."

"Do you think it should be a little spicier?"

"It could be a bit hotter."

"Good. Then it's finished." She wrapped up the bowl in wax paper and put it in the icebox.

"So how many people are you expecting?"

"I don't know. It's kind of an open party; I've invited, oh, two dozen, but they're welcome to bring their friends."

"Oh. That's good." He resumed slicing.

Dahlu glanced over at him, eyes narrowed. "You're thinking of inviting the bat, aren't you?"

Mika faltered slightly, then cursed inwardly for letting her see he was afraid of her reaction. "You said you wouldn't have a problem with me seeing her."

"I didn't say I wouldn't have a problem with *me* seeing her." She sighed and shook her head. "I'm not sure she'd like being here, either."

"You're scared of how the guests would react to her."

"Why shouldn't I be?" Her voice rose a little. "You know more about bats than anyone else who'll be there, and she still makes you nervous!"

"No, she doesn't," he said. "Not anymore."

"Love, when I tell everyone that dinner is served, half of them will expect her to be looking at somebody's throat instead of the table. Even if she doesn't do anything to antagonize anyone, someone's likely to do something to antagonize her. And I honestly don't think she's the type who looks the other way when somebody offends her, is she?"

"I don't think it'll be that way," he sighed.

She looked at him more closely, closing her hand over his wrist and staring up with slitted eyes. "You've already invited her, haven't you?" He was silent. She removed her hand from his after a moment. "Remember, this was your idea." She stomped out of the kitchen.

The drujhar leaned back in his chair, a picture in each hand, and pursed his lips. After a moment, he set one of them back in the portfolio, then set the other one down to the side. "This is the best one."

Mika looked across the desk. It was the sketch of Revar, now pen-and-ink, toned with watercolor wash. "I like what you've done with the shadows here," the dwarf continued, stroking his beard. "Some of the other ones you've shaded that way are effective, too. You're not all that good with stippling, but the wash effects are nice."

"I'd be interested in showing this one"—he gestured towards Revar's image—"and this." The second one was a dock scene, a ship being loaded at twilight; the colors were all subtle variations on a cool, dark shade of grey. It wasn't one

Mika himself was too fond of. "But," he continued, "I can't promise you anything. The bat piece might be a hard sell."

"Even though you think it's the best one?"

"It is, technically. It is. But it has a more limited audience, especially in a market as small as this one. People here prefer art that can hang over a dinner table without making viewers lose their appetite. Your subject here is too intense. And your style is somewhat unconventional. In Rionar, it is likely to be appreciated more by gallery owners than by art owners." He came as close to smiling as drujhars ever do.

Mika cleared his throat and looked down briefly. This was it. "If you'd be interested in at least trying...."

"Certainly." The drujhar produced a sheaf of papers from a drawer. "Read these, and don't sign until you have. There are other art dealers who have smaller commissions than I do, but I would advise you not to seek them out unless you'd like risking a lot more money, not to mention any art you leave with them."

A few minutes later Mika was standing outside Phisfir Galleries, his portfolio in one hand and the sheaf of papers—which, upon examination, proved to only be eight, five of which were flyers—in the other. He shook his head, wondering what had motivated him to actually take his work to someone who might be interested. Of course, he knew exactly who had. He walked home with a disorienting feeling of both happiness and confusion.

• • •

"So, how's the criminal element?" The burly fox grinned as he passed by Mika; the cat smiled mechanically, picturing the fox wearing Dahlu's gooey orange dip.

"Oh, that's not nice, Jack," a female human who had been talking at Mika for the past ten minutes said. "It sounds kind of exciting. It'd be fun to do some of the things you've been doing, Mikki—I just don't have the nerve for that sort of lifestyle, I guess."

"I have a life now, not a lifestyle," he said. She smiled at him blankly; he took the opportunity to excuse himself and head for the relative safety of the kitchen. "And I hate that nickname," he said to the icebox. It didn't reply.

He had no idea where Dahlu was; Scat, the bulldog, had been following her around about an hour ago, as he did whenever he saw her, but after this long of being politely—and not so politely—rebuffed, he usually gave up until the next party.

The doorbell went off again, for at least the thirtieth time. None of the guests moved to open it; he left the kitchen and got the door himself, opening it to yet another happy couple he didn't recognize. He wondered if they even knew whose

house this was; he was sure that several of the guests were only there because they heard rumors of a large party.

Mika wouldn't have thought the anniversary of the Empire's founding would be a holiday traditionally celebrated by getting smashed. He preferred to think of the party as celebrating his first appearance in a gallery, however small; Dahlu had made a point to mention it to every being she came in contact with, though, and even this victory—which had seemed so major earlier in the day—was beginning to make him somewhat numb.

The doorbell went off again, and he opened it as a reflex action, barely noting the near-strangers who stepped through. He nodded perfunctorily and went back to the kitchen to refill his glass of mead. The honey-wine was Mika's one alcoholic weakness, and this variety—produced in Raneadhros, the Empire's capital city-state some two hundred miles to the north—was particularly good.

The next time the bell sounded, he almost dropped his glass when he opened the door.

Revar was dressed all in light brown, wearing a skirt—of sorts—for the first time since Mika had known her. Her entire top, from where the skirt ended well below her midriff, was comprised of two narrow vertical strips of cloth, running straight up her sides under her breasts, across them and up to her shoulders, tying in a knot behind her neck. The cleavage she had seemed all the more impressive in the arrangement. The skirt itself barely covered her thighs, although by her standards it must have been a full-length dress. Two strips in front, matching the top, hung down almost to her knees, and two wider strips in back hung to just below her thighs. She was wearing a long, dark brown cloak that swooped close to the ground; as she moved, it swung enough to reveal her sides, the dress hiding almost nothing from that angle. Although Mika had seen her wearing less, the effect was still heart-stopping.

The conversation of those closest to the door stopped as she began to attract notice; she looked around and smiled at Mika, unusually self-conscious. "Well, kitten, I made it."

"You look... beautiful," he finally said.

"Thank you," she said, smiling more broadly. "You look pretty handsome yourself." She stepped past him, not noticing (or ignoring) the blush he felt sure was visible through his fur.

"You're Revar?" Jack, the fox, was the first one from the closest group to speak again. The bat raised her eyebrows quizzically in response; several people gasped audibly, passing comments about her night-black eyes in stage whispers between themselves, but Jack merely stuck out his hand. "You're not what I expected."

She regarded his hand with faint surprise, then shook it. "And what were you expecting?"

"Hard to say, really. Someone with a lighter grip, maybe." He rubbed his wrist with his other hand. "Dahlu's told us a fair amount about you."

"It's probably not true," she said. "Or most of it isn't." Jack grinned; a few people nearby tittered nervously. Conversation around them started to resume, Revar being the new topic of choice.

"Would you like anything to drink?" Mika interrupted.

"Ale, if you have it," she said.

"Of course we have it." He headed off to the kitchen, bumping into Dahlu on the way. "Is that—?" she said, glancing towards the knot of people clustered around Jack and Revar.

"It is. So far only one of the guests has been bold enough to speak to her."

"As long as speaking is all that happens, I'll be happy," she said, heading back towards the patio.

When he returned with Revar's drink, the bat had been guided towards a couch; Jack was still the only one speaking to her, although a small mouse girl Mika didn't recognize had found enough nerve to sit on the same piece of furniture with the bat, albeit pressed into the cushions on the other end. He handed the drink to Revar and smiled at the mouse, who was so nervous she didn't notice. Of course, if he was only half Revar's size and didn't know her, he wouldn't have wanted to get too close, either.

"Yes, I'm sure it does," the bat was saying, looking mildly trapped.

Jack raised his hands in apology. "That's probably not a good subject to bring up. I can't help but be interested in it, but I shouldn't put you on the spot." Revar looked somewhat relieved and took a large swallow of ale.

"If it hurts your victims that much, why don't you go after animals?" the mouse said suddenly.

Revar turned towards her too quickly; the little rodent squeaked involuntarily and shrank into the pillows.

"Don't hurt her," a woman in the crowd said anxiously.

"Hairballs, Linda, all she did was move," Jack said. "Relax a bit."

"Because there's not enough in the city," Revar said. "Ones that live here are small—the largest ones are people's pets. If I took one of them—which I've had to do—I'd usually kill it

without meaning to." *I've been through this before*, Mika thought, sighing.

"You can't just take a little?"

"How much I drink is almost involuntary. The longer I go without blood, the more I'll take when I finally can."

"Killing somebody's pet would be better than attacking someone in this room," the mouse said.

"Tell that to the pet's owner. Or, for that matter, the pet," Revar said. "And I'm not planning to attack anyone here."

"Could you stop yourself if you were hungry?"

"Attacking somebody isn't automatic for me any more than drinking that wine is for you." Revar's tone was still polite, but it was obvious her patience was wearing thin.

The mouse folded her arms, apparently unconvinced. "Then why live in the city? Go somewhere else." Revar was saved from further questioning by Dahlu's announcement of dinner; as she had predicted, most of the guests edged away from the bat at the mention of food. When she realized what was going on, the glowering expression she formed only made people more nervous; she ended up sitting with Mika to her left and Jack to her right, several empty seats to either side beyond them. Dahlu sat across from Mika, with Scat—evidently not giving up on Dahlu's bed yet—sitting on her left, opposite Revar.

The dinner was buffet-style; Revar sat by herself while the others went to fill their plates. Mika came back with a plate for her; she smiled, but didn't take any food from it.

When Dahlu noticed the bat wasn't eating, she became solicitous. "You don't like it?"

"I haven't tried it yet," she said. "It smells very good. But I'm not all that hungry. Maybe a little later."

"Already ate?" Scat said, seeming to take notice of the bat for the first time. "Anyone we know?"

Revar looked across at him unblinkingly; he assumed the expression of someone trying very hard not to flinch. "That was uncalled for," she said softly.

"So were you," the bulldog replied, wolfing down a meat roll. Dahlu sucked in her breath sharply; he looked at her in momentary confusion, then turned back to the bat, his features relaxing. "I mean, you weren't really invited. I didn't mean to be insulting. You understand."

"Perfectly," Revar said, her voice softer but riding over steel. Mika put a cautioning hand on her arm, earning him an unreadable—but markedly unpleasant—look from Dahlu.

Revar shook his hand off.

"I invited her," Mika said. Scat waved the explanation aside with a carrot stick.

"Nice of you," he said. "She's probably never been in this neighborhood before. Not normally a safe place for people like her to be wandering in. Or flying in."

"That's because people like you call the Guard when you see people like me."

Scat's near-polite mask disappeared. "Better safe than sorry," he said, leaning back in his chair and trying to look casual.

"Because I'm a bat, or because you think I'm a criminal?"

"Both." He downed another meat roll. "Look. You know and I know the only reason you'd be here if softheart there wasn't being nice to you is to steal something. Right?"

Revar abruptly pushed back from the table. "I don't need to be called a criminal." She turned.

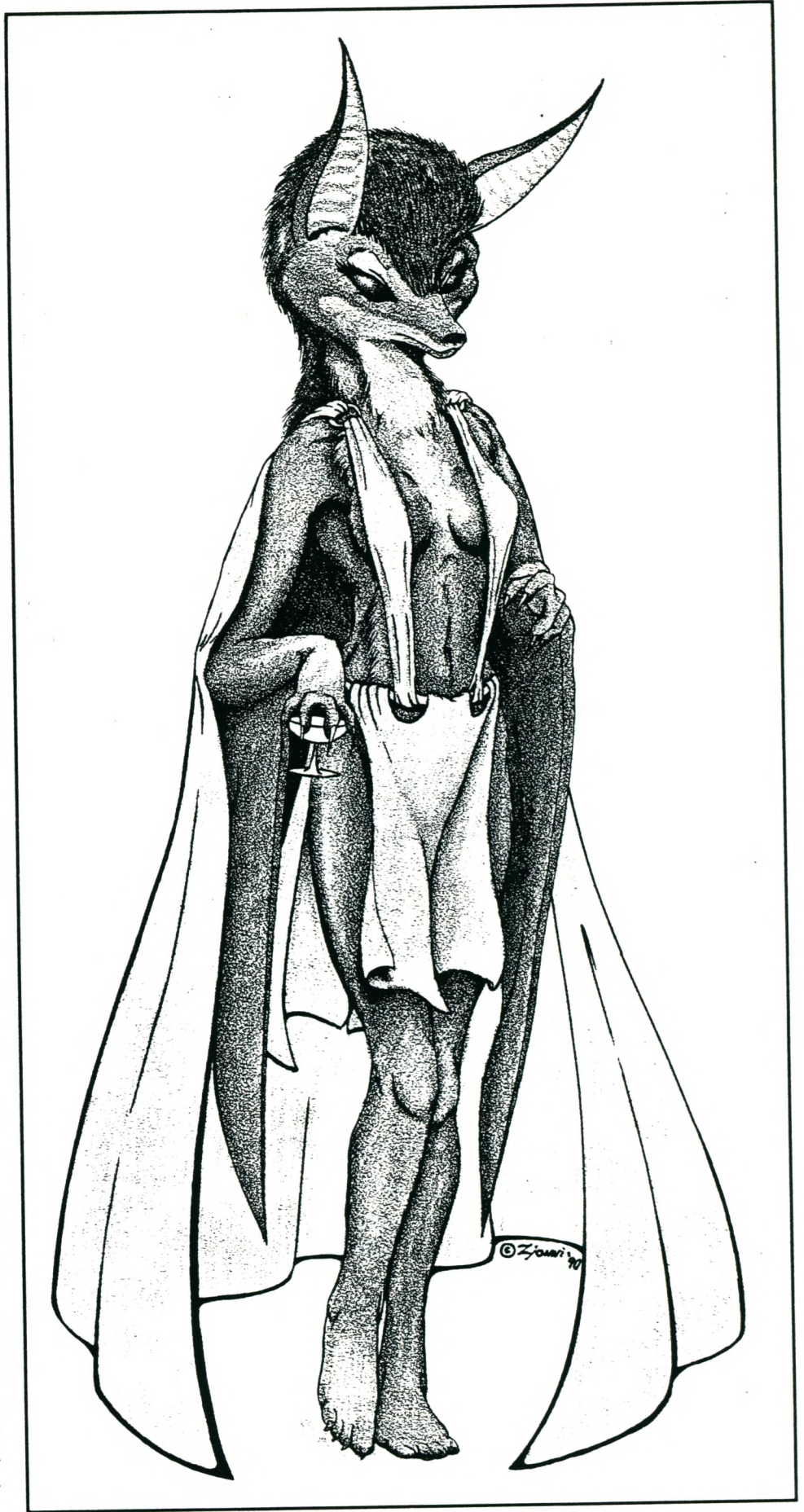
"What else do you call somebody who kills people?" Scat said. She whirled around; he smiled and spread his hands.

"Well, you do, don't you?" the mouse said. Revar glared at her with an expression that said *I could suck you dry in five minutes*. The mouse sank back in her chair, looking like she wanted to slide under the table.

"If she's a criminal, somebody should call the police," a voice said.

Jack suddenly stood up, dropping his empty plate to the table with a melodramatic clang. "Give it a rest, people. She's not on your case, so get off hers."

"Maybe I *should* be on their cases," Revar said, walking around the table to stand over Scat's chair. "I don't need to apologize for the way I live to you, or to anyone else. Just look at you. I came here because I wanted a fun evening—something you've succeeded in screw-



ing up for me. But this is your whole life, isn't it?"

Scat stared up at her with a baffled expression. She moved back and looked around the room; conversation had stopped at all the tables and couches, and all forty-odd guests were staring at her. "This is it for all of you, isn't it? You don't have anything else to do. You have nice little careers, or you're perpetual students because you don't want to face even that much of the real world. You do work for someone else, work you probably don't like, and then come to every party you can and get wasted.

"I know people like that on the docks, too. You're not that different from them. Except they don't have anyone to feel superior to, so they're not as insufferable as some of you are." She ripped off her cloak and flexed her wings, eliciting gasps from most of the crowd.

Scat stood up now; he towered over the bat by a foot, and outmassed her by almost three times. "You're a dangerously arrogant one," he said.

"And you're a dangerously fat one," she replied, turning her back on him and starting to walk towards the door. He grabbed her by one arm, whirling her back towards him.

"You're going to prove how tough you are by beating up a girl," Jack said, crossing his arms. Mika rose to his feet and crossed towards the bulldog and bat.

"I'm not going to do anything to her."

"Then let go of my arm," Revar hissed.

"Unless," he continued, "she comes back when she isn't invited." He wrenched her arm backwards and she hissed more sharply. "That wrist of yours looks pretty fragile." He slid his hand up her arm, wrapping two fingers around the wing joint, and squeezed. She yelped.

"If you break her wings, she can't fly," Mika said, reaching towards Scat's arm. He yanked it away, causing Revar to wince with pain.

"You're a quick one, cat." He turned back towards Revar. "I don't like being lectured by people like you. Five years from now, I'll be closer the top, and you'll be lying dead in a gutter. Don't press any of us or you won't make it that long."

"Speak for yourself," Jack said. "Let go of her wing."

"I don't know if I want her to fly out of here," he said, squeezing a little more. Revar's eyes widened, then narrowed as she brought her other shoulder forward, swinging her free arm lightly towards Scat.

"Don't try—" the bulldog was cut off with a choke, stiffening. Revar's free hand was between his legs, claws dug into his

pants in a graphically disturbing fashion. He started to yank her wing down; she flexed her other hand slightly and he gasped, then stood stock-still.

"Okay, ace, how about a trade," Revar said, staring up at him. "My wing for your future children."

He stared at her; she smiled sweetly. "You let go first," he finally gritted.

"Sorry. I don't trust you any further than I could throw you." *About ten feet?* Mika thought.

"And I should trust you?"

"Look at it this way. You break my wing, it'll hurt—but it'll probably heal."

Scat stared at her a moment more, then let go of her wing. "Thanks," she said, giving him a squeeze as she released him. He yowled and doubled over.

Revar picked up her plate and headed towards the door. "I am hungry now," she said as she passed Dahlu, "but I think I should probably call it an evening. I'll tell Mika how the food was. And I will return your plate. Wouldn't want you to think I was a thief." She smiled sweetly; Dahlu stared at her open-mouthed for a second longer, then ran over to Scat with a glass of water. He knocked it out of her hands.

By the time Revar reached the door, the bulldog had recovered enough breath to look up at her, eyes filled with hatred. "If you come anywhere near here, you will be sorry." It carried the weight of a promise.

"I'm sorry I'm near here now. No offense to the rest of you." She looked around the still-silent room, smiling brightly. "That is, if there's anyone here I haven't offended already. Good evening, all." She stepped through the door, closing it softly behind her.

Nobody spoke for several seconds; then the room exploded into conversation. Several people went over to Scat, murmuring sympathetic platitudes. The mouse suggested filing assault charges with the Guard. Dahlu looked at Mika mournfully, not quite an *I told you so* expression but close enough to be uncomfortable.

"I like her," Jack announced to nobody in particular. Mika glanced at Dahlu once more, then ran out the door after Revar. She was already gone.

Dahlu looked angry enough to throw the plate she was holding at him, so Mika stepped away, just shaking his head. "You don't see it at all, do you?" she screamed.

He shook his head negatively. She had already said it hadn't

been Revar's fault, but that appeared to be immaterial—it was somehow Revar's fault anyway, and by implication, Mika's.

"She was inviting trouble just by being here. She knew it, and you knew it when you invited her."

"In other words, Scat's completely blameless. If Revar hadn't been there, he would only have had his normal, defenseless targets to abuse."

"Of course he's not blameless."

"Then—?"

"Even if he started it, she didn't have to finish it." She slammed the plate into the sink. "Mika, she killed my party."

"In cold blood, I'm sure." She snorted. "Love, most people went right back to normal after she left. *She* was the only one who really left hurt, except for Scat. And I can't believe you have more sympathy for him than you do for her."

She sighed and stomped into the living room, Mika following a few quiet steps behind. "I don't have any sympathy for either of them," she said. "I just wish it hadn't happened."

"I don't think she wanted it, either."

"And what did she want?" She sat down on the couch and regarded him dolefully. "I saw the way you looked at her when she came in."

"Huh?"

"If there hadn't been anyone else around, you would have ripped her clothes off right then."

"That's not true!" he spluttered.

"Come on," she spat. "Everybody saw it. She has you wrapped around one of her cute little fangs."

"I'm not interested in her that way, Dahlu. I've—"

"You've said that. I know. But even if it's true now, how long will it be?"

Mika sat down beside her, reaching out one arm. "You know you're just as pretty as she is. Prettier."

"No," she said, pulling away. "I'm pretty, but I'm not exotic. She's both." She crossed her arms on her chest and shrank into the pillows, gazing at the far wall. "You're attracted to danger. You have been ever since you started going down to the docks. And she's the most dangerous thing you know."

"Cut it out," Mika said, taking her arm and pulling her

towards his lap; she didn't resist, but didn't respond to his hug. "You know that's not true."

"I know it is. You know she's attractive."

"Yes."

"To you."

"Does that matter?"

"Yes." She sniffled.

"I love you," he said simply, as if it were an explanation.

She sat bolt upright against him, pressing herself to him and clutching at his shoulders. "Stop seeing her." Her voice was desperate.

He stroked her hair away from her eyes, then looked away. "You can't understand, can you?"

"No," she whispered, laying her head against his chest and starting to cry. "I can't."

The dragon was still jawless, its spout having deteriorated over the week since its disfigurement into a sick spray almost completely missing the pool. The water was low enough to see the bottom even in the partial moon's light, hundreds of tarnished coins glinting barely just out of Mika's reach.

The lock on the gate had been replaced; lacking Revar's strength, he took the more conventional tack of climbing over the twenty-foot fence with a hook and rope, now stored safely in his backpack.

Several people had expressed interest in his pictures, according to the drujhar—and, as the dwarf had predicted, most were other gallery owners, from other parts of Garanelt or, in some cases, from other territories. None had offered to buy either at the price the drujhar was charging; Mika thought he had greatly overvalued them, but the owner insisted he was pricing them too low. Evidently not low enough for purchasers, though.

He didn't hear a noise behind him as much as feel a familiar presence. Revar moved closer to him, grinned, and sat down on the edge of the fountain. "That snake's pretty screwed up, isn't it?" Her smile faded with Mika's silence. "I was flying overhead, saw you here, and thought it was unusual for you to be trespassing this time of night. Anything wrong?"

He sat down on the ground, his back against the side of the fountain. "It's not unusual for me anymore. I must be hanging out with the wrong crowd." He sighed.

"Princess is on your back about me?"

He tilted his head back to look up at Revar. "Yes. And no." He looked down again. She started to rub his neck lightly; he stiffened at first, then relaxed. "She doesn't want me to keep seeing you."

"I already knew that."

"I thought she had come to terms with it." He leaned forward, and she moved her hand onto his shoulder, matching it with her other one. The leading edge of her wings wisped against his forearms, creating pleasant but vaguely unsettling sensations to run up his spine. "Mmm. She accused me of being attracted to you."

"Are you?" She rubbed a little harder, and he started purring softly.

"Yes."

"And because of that, we must be having a love affair." She laughed.

"I'm not selling any art, either. I mean, I'm trying. Just not succeeding."

"It's only been a week."

"He says I might have to try in some bigger cities."

"You could come with me to Raneadhros."

He pulled away, twisting around to face her. "You're leaving?"

"Relax," she said, forcing him back into his original position and continuing the massage. "I've been thinking about leaving for a year now. It might be another year before I do."

"But with you, it could be tomorrow." He sighed.

"Well, if I go, now you'll know where to find me."

Mika was silent for a few more minutes, his purr gradually fading, until he suddenly stood up, walking away from the fountain towards the manicured grass nearby.

"Now what?" Revar called, rising to her own feet and ambling towards him.

"I'm losing her," he said.

She studied him for a few seconds. "You love her?"

"What kind of a question is that?"

"An honest one. But you do love her. I can see that."

"You sound disappointed," he said, looking over at her. She shrugged, smiling her most enigmatic smile.

"I can't lose her over you."

"You want to stop seeing me?"

"No," he said, dropping down on the grass. "I don't want to be forced to make a choice."

She sat down beside him, wings open, arms stretched out behind her. "Are you worried she's right?" she asked softly.

"Right about what?"

"That we might become lovers." She looked down, chuckling. "A vampire bat and a starving artist kitten. I'm not sure I see us as a couple."

He smiled. Then something seemed to well up from inside, and without warning, he was crying. "I'm trying... and I don't know what else to do...." his voice trailed off into an unwilling sob.

Somehow, Revar's arms were around him; he leaned against her, his hands on her shoulders and his cheek against her chest, the top of his head nestled under her chin. She stroked his mane softly with one hand, her wings wrapped around him; they were soft and much warmer than he had imagined, almost hot, but oddly comforting. "All we can ever do is try, kitten," she whispered. "Try and hope."

He looked up her, her face less than an inch from his own, and stroked her arm. "I'm not a kitten," he whispered, moving closer still.

She pursed her lips, then opened them slightly, letting out a long, shuddering breath, her mouth moving to a hair's breadth from his own. Then she put a claw on the tip of his nose and pushed him away, almost regretfully. "If you—if we—do that, it'll be the end of you and Dahlu. Are you sure you want that?"

He looked down. Her breasts were stretched tight against the fabric of her top, nipples noticeably erect. He looked back up hurriedly. "No."

She laughed, following his gaze. "So I find you attractive, too. I can't help it if you're cute. Especially when you're upset." She stroked his mane again, letting her claws trail lightly down his shirt to the base of his tail. "Right now, your love is Dahlu, kitten. I still think she's a pastahead, but she's *your* pastahead. And as much as I hate to admit it, I think she cares about you, too. You're either going to have to fix your relationship fast or give it a mercy killing."

Mika huddled against her and sighed. "Hold me?" he said at last. She wrapped her wings around him again and buried

her face in his mane.

The sun was setting as Mika walked up the street after work. He wasn't sure what he was going to say to Dahlu, but he knew Revar was right. He wanted to keep both of them as friends, but didn't know what to do about them as lovers. Revar wasn't his lover, of course, but unless last night hadn't happened, she very well could be. But the bat could be happy with him just as a friend, and vice-versa; the same might not be true of his feline love. It was dependent on convincing Dahlu that he could keep thinking of Revar just as a friend. And convincing himself.

The two human Guardsmen, dressed in their typical, near-immaculate red uniform, nodded politely as they ran past Mika at top speed. "Good day to you too," the cat said perplexedly. He didn't run after them until he realized they were heading the same place he was. As he reached Dahlu's door, another Guard appeared behind him, also politely nodding as he pushed Mika aside and raced through the doorway.

"What in—?" The living room was, for Dahlu, a shambles: all the couch pillows were on the floor, and a good china plate lay overturned in their midst. Dahlu herself was suspended in the air, her neck firmly in the grip of one of Revar's taloned hands. "What the hell are you doing?"

Revar was staring, wild-eyed, at the two guards already present. Both had swords drawn. "Revar!" Mika yelled.

She looked over at him. "I—" she started to say. "She tricked me," she said. "I tried...."

"Put down the cat, ma'am," one of the Guard said politely, raising his sword.

"What are you talking about?" He turned towards the closest uniformed human. "What's going on?"

"Your guess is as good as mine. I'd appreciate you standing out of the way in case someone gets hurt, sir."

"She's not going to hurt anyone," Mika snapped. The Guard grunted skeptically. "Put her down," he said to Revar.

"I—" she said again. She looked up at Dahlu, who stared down resolutely, trying not to tremble, and then across at Mika. To Mika's shock, a tear rolled down the bat's cheek; she set Dahlu down gently.

As soon as Dahlu was on her feet, all three Guards moved towards Revar. She crouched down, then leaped forwards, trying to clear them; one grabbed her legs, and she crashed to the floor. One Guard produced a pair of handcuffs and tried to figure out how to put them on her as the other two held her

down; her legs weren't strong enough to break free from the grip the first had on them, but when the one with the handcuffs leaned over her, she found a steel grip on both his shoulders. She screamed, a piercingly shrill screech, and threw him into the air; he sailed over the couch and landed at Mika's feet. The cat stepped over him and raced to Revar's side. "Stop it!" he said to the other Guards.

They managed to roll her onto her back; the third one joined them after a few seconds and slipped one cuff on her wrist before getting slammed into the couch by the back of her hand. All three of them working together held her long enough for the other wrist to be cuffed. When she was shackled, she stopped struggling momentarily and stared at the chain, then pulled on it experimentally. Then she pulled with all her strength. There was an unsettling cracking noise, but the chain held. She stared at it, open-mouthed, and wailed.

"Will that hold long enough to get her to the station?" The first Guard asked.

"It should, but all the same, I'd rather we move quickly." Two of them lifted Revar to her feet, as gently as they could given her renewed struggling. The third one—the one who Revar had literally thrown around the room—walked over to Dahlu, rubbing his back with one hand and moving with a pronounced limp. "Do you want to press charges, ma'am?"

Dahlu looked at Revar; the bat was pinned against one of the Guards, both his arms around her waist in a bear hug. Dahlu rubbed her neck, muttering under her breath.

"No," she said after a moment. "It was a... misunderstanding. I don't."

"Oh," the Guard said, looking somewhat surprised. "Well. Good day, then." He headed out the door, the other two following, bringing the struggling bat with them. When Revar realized she wasn't going to be let go, she screamed again, this time a colorful description of one Guard's ancestry, and began fighting with even more fury.

"Wait! She said she wasn't pressing charges!" Mika said angrily. "When are you going to let her go?"

"We can't do that, sir. There are already assault charges pending against her." The Guard spoke with difficulty; when he was close enough to hold her still, he was within range of her teeth, and the other Guard was doing his best to keep his partner's throat from being ripped out.

"What?"

"Complete—*stop that, ma'am!*—details are at the station. I really do have to be leaving, sir." All three of them stepped through the door; Revar's eyes connected with Mika's, seeming to ask a question he didn't understand. Then she was

gone.

He turned towards Dahlu, who was sitting on the floor, facing away from him. "She came to visit you and you called the Guard?"

"I didn't," she said without looking up. "They must have seen her come in the neighborhood."

"They don't just watch the entrance streets to see if the riffraff wanders in, dammit!"

"For known riffraff, yes, they do," she said tightly. "She didn't believe me, either. That's why she grabbed me. If I had called them, do you think I would have let the matter drop? Especially after she tried to kill me?"

"I don't know." He ran his hands through his mane. "What was she here for?"

"To talk. About you. And to return the dish." She gestured at the overturned plate. "She was right. She isn't a thief." She laughed bitterly. "But she knows more about you than I do, doesn't she?"

Mika walked to the door without replying, then turned when he got there. "Are you coming down to the station?"

"If you're asking me to pay her bail, I can't do it." Her back was still towards the door; she hadn't looked at him since the Guard had left. He watched her a moment longer, then walked out, slamming the door behind him.

• • •

"She doesn't offer what you need from her, not really. And she doesn't see it. I just wanted her to support you a little bit more." Revar spoke to him from the other side of a mesh screen; she was no longer bound, but five Guard stood watch over her.

"You wanted to do this by getting yourself killed?"

Revar sniffled. "I thought she had called them somehow. If I get out of here, I'll show that damned dog what assault really means."

"You'll get out. I'll get you out. As soon as I can."

She smiled, but didn't say anything.

"Time's up, sir," the guard on his side of the screen said. Mika pressed one hand against the screen; she touched it briefly with her own, then allowed the Guards to lead her away with a quietness that chilled him.

Mika waited in the station lobby another ten hours, through the rest of the night, drinking coffee and sharing donuts with

a talkative ferret Guard until the presiding officer reviewed Revar's case.

As he had known, Scat had been the one who pressed charges against her. "I was there. She didn't assault him. Or at least, it was in self-defense."

"You can speak in her behalf at the trial, Mr. Radgers," the officer, an elderly, bespectacled skunk replied. "However, charges have been filed, and under Ranean Law, all felonies must go to trial unless the plaintiff chooses to waive that right and settle out of court. Mr. Hozrin has already declined to do so.

"Considering the circumstances in which the defendant was arrested—namely, in the process of committing another assault, regardless of whether or not charges were filed—I cannot, in good conscience, allow her to go free with no or even minimum bail. Therefore, bail is set at two thousand vars."

Mika's heart dropped. That was more than he made in two months; he had, at most, three hundred on hand. Even if Dahlu could be convinced to loan him money, she would have to borrow that much from her parents, who would not look kindly on paying bail for someone who assaulted both the son of a prominent socialite and their own daughter.

"Further considering the large backload of cases presently in this district in Rionar, the earliest I can set the trial date is...." He searched through a calendar in front of him. "The 26th, at one hour past threechime." He wrote the date down on a scrap paper and handed it to Mika. "If you are unable to raise bail for the defendant and wish to appear in her behalf, please be prompt." He set the papers for the case aside and went on to the next one.

It was only the third of the month; that meant more than three weeks in jail for Revar. And three weeks on normal prison food. *I can't afford to get caught. It'd kill me.* Mika stopped outside the station, feeling the sun's heat on his fur but ice forming beneath it, and closed his eyes. ☹



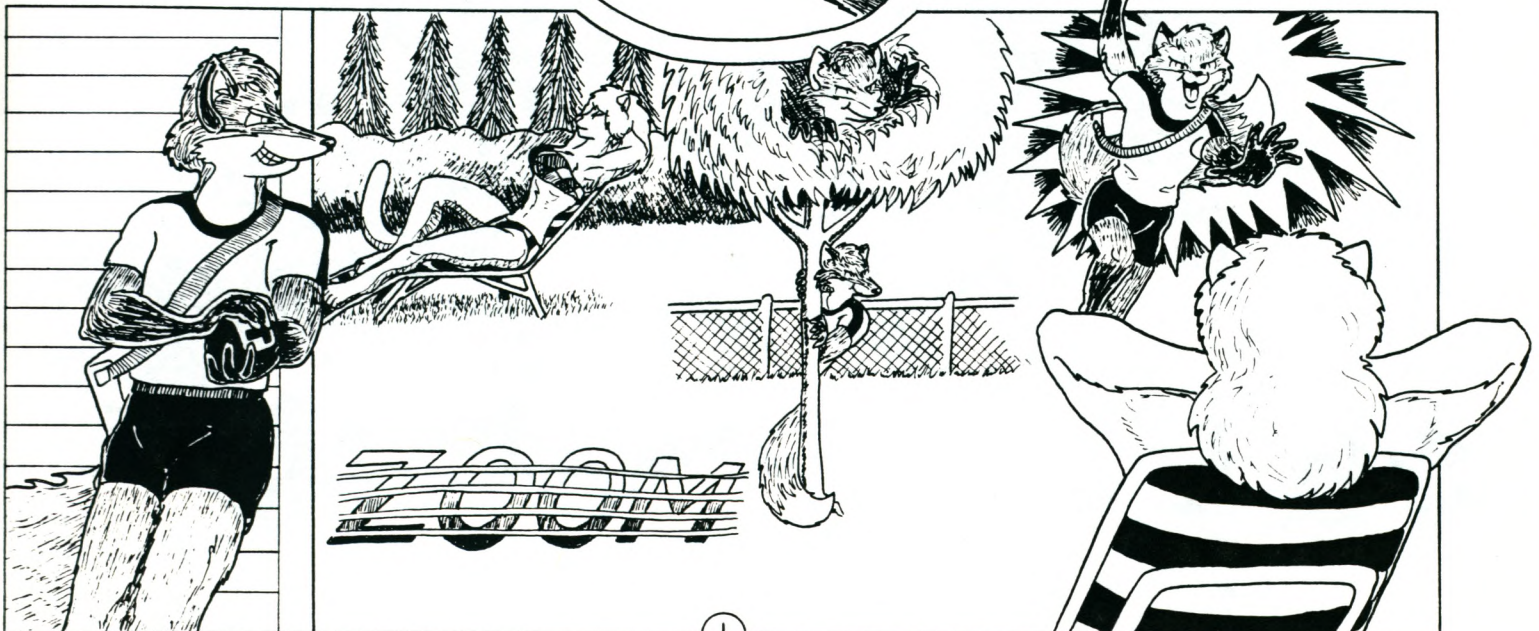
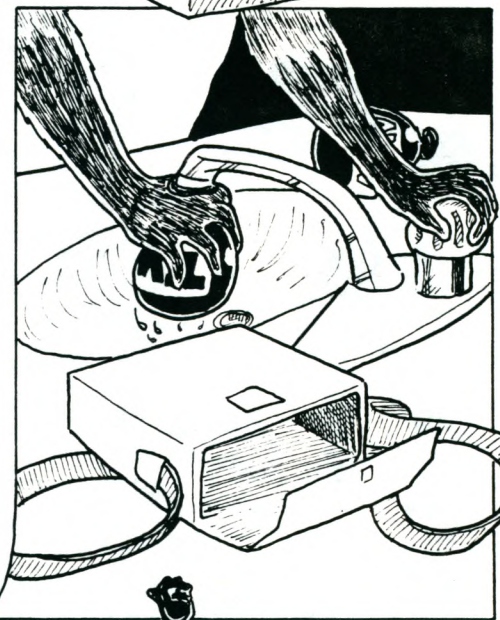
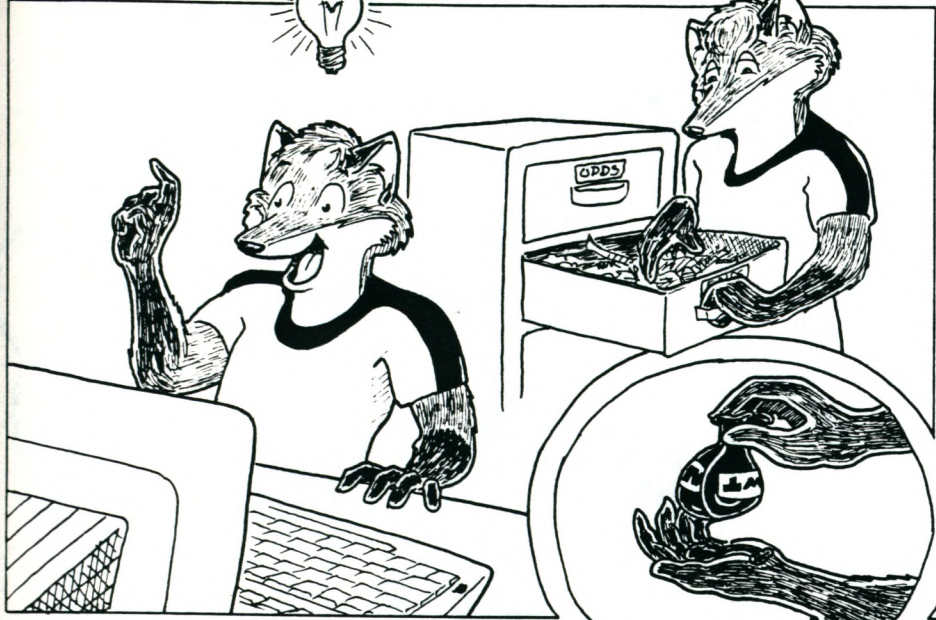
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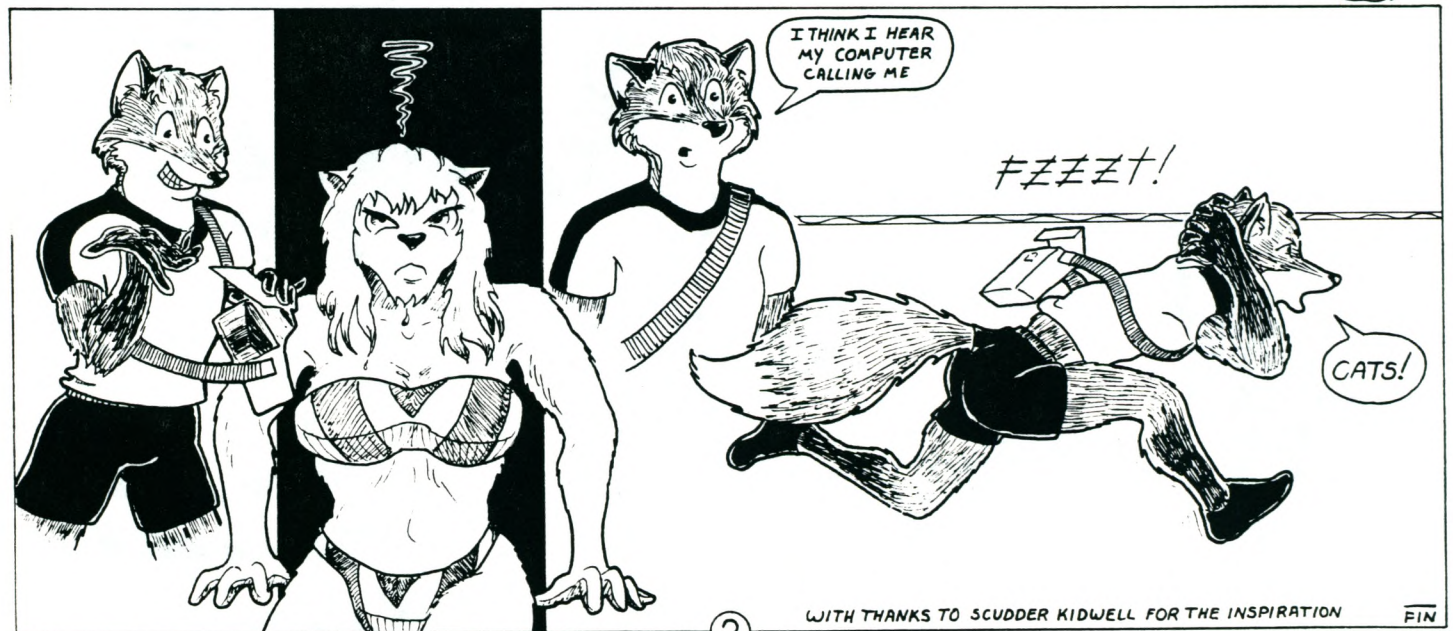
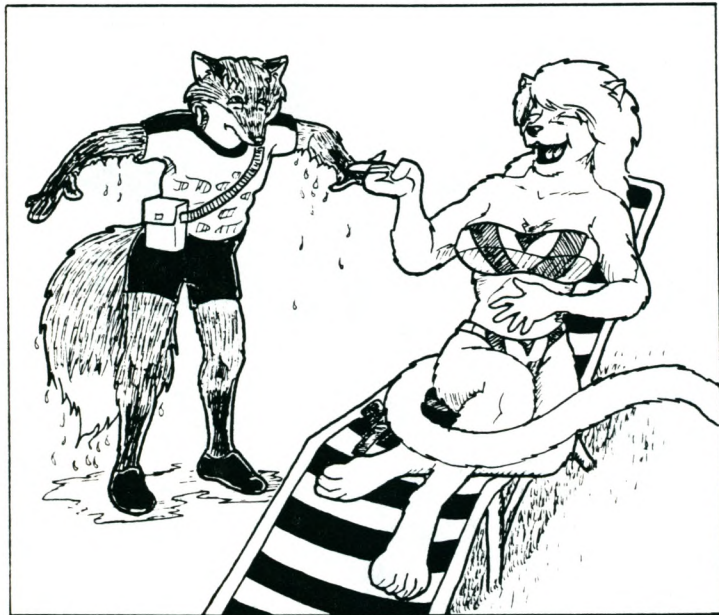
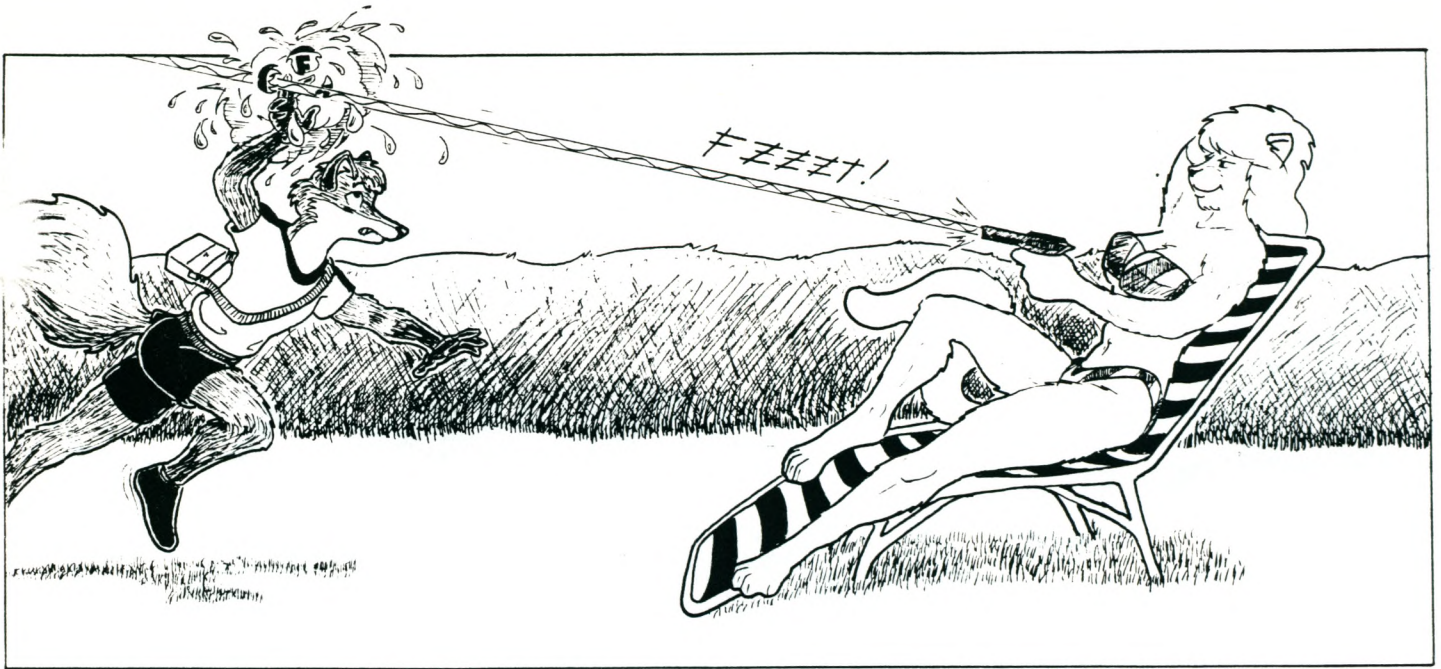


ROBERT KAVANA

"THE
GRENADIER" KREUTZMAN
©900914

What if I could...
Pete my...
in a...
it...
...
...







Monika ©1989



Mara

WebFed:

ANATOMY OF A UNIVERSE

by Ken Pick
illustrated by Dave Kuhn and Ken Pick

In YARF! #3, Waverly Pierre's "But Can You Do This" introduced a new set of furies to the public--the Thalendri, "elven-slim, fancy-dressed foxes and vixens". These Twenty-nth Century Foxes are part of a larger universe--WebFed, which according to its byline was "Created by Kurt Miller and chronicled by Ken Pick".

This all started with one Kurt Miller, a local character and very creative (but undisciplined) "idea man". The problem is, he's so busy coming up with a constant stream of new ideas that he doesn't do much more with old ideas... like develop them into finished form, or edit out inconsistencies.

Enter me--Ken Pick, a typical furfan and off-and-on friend of Kurt's. Since about 1984, I've been collecting and editing Kurt's trail of ideas about his space-opera universe (originally started as a background for some still-unwritten space-pirate stories he calls "The Thompson Papers").

I'd gotten intrigued by some high-society throwaway characters of his, which some promptly tagged "Lifestyles of the Rich and Furry". Since then, I've been collecting Kurt's ideas and wonderfully self-contradictory notes, discarding the absurdities, inconsistencies, and unintended plagiarisms, assembling the remainder into a coherent whole, then filling in the gaps from there to form the present WebFed.

When edited down and assembled, WebFed was pretty much a generic pulp space opera except for the addition of furies. As time went on (aided by the Thalendri and my set of 1929 Encyclopedia Britannica), it began to show a distinct style, described by my co-conspirator Clint Warlick as the Roaring Twenties with furies and starships instead of Prohibition and "The Mob".

In the summer of 1988, we had Kurt sign a release yielding editorial control to Clint and myself, giving us the freedom to continue development. About two months later, I met Waverly Pierre at the San Diego Comic Con, we compared notes on our pet projects, and WebFed started on its way as a shared universe. He started writing "But Can You Do This" (with myself as a background consultant/continuity editor) and started searching for a 'zine to publish it. Then came YARF!

Today (mid-1990), WebFed is starting to grow on its own, a deliberately anachronistic, soft-edged Art Deco with fur, tails, and high-tech.

WebFed is the major interstellar government of the region. Founded 577 years ago, it has been known at various times as the Starweb, the Web Federation, the Web Confederacy, and the Confederacy; "WebFed" is the longest-lasting and most common name, and will be used throughout.

Kurt's notes actually used all of the above names at one point or another; we settled on "WebFed" because it was the simplest and most unique.

The WebFed badge shows three twelve-pointed starbursts (six greater, six lesser points) on a black field arranged in an equilateral triangle (one above, two below) on a black field. The three stars represent the homesuns of the three founding species – red for Larant (reptiles), gold for K'thymri (jackal-bats), and blue for Skreeln (avians). Originally the "big three" displayed the badge with their own color star on top, but now all three positions are

used interchangeably.

WebFed's flag is an equilateral triangle, with two starbursts in the hoist and one in the fly. Like the badge, all three positions are used interchangeably.

CALENDAR

All dates are given in the WebFed calendar (FSC), dating from WebFed's founding. The present date is FSC 577. A WebFed year is about 10% longer than an Earth year.

HISTORY

WebFed was originally founded by the federation of three species (the K'thymri, Larant, and Skreeln) in what is now the Triangle Systems District. Since then it has grown into the major power in this part of space.

WEBFED CHRONOLOGY

FSC -264	Massive nuclear war devastates the K'thymri population and homeworld.
FSC -172	Postwar reconstruction finished; first K'thymri spaceflight
FSC -145	First Larant starflight; The Larant begin exploration of neighboring systems.
FSC -139	Both of Karkullian's moons settled; permanent industrial space colonies orbit the K'thymri homeworld.
FSC -098	K'thymri develop FTL stardrives.
FSC -071	K'thymri/Skreeln First Contact.
FSC -026	K'thymri/Larant First Contact.
FSC Zero	WebFed formed as a formal alliance between the K'thymri, Larant, and Skreeln.
FSC 032	Hibernian Freehold founded by humans from Earth when their FTL colonizer shifts into unknown space.
FSC 041	First evidence of a forerunner race ("The Elder Ones") discovered in the ammonia glaciers of Swycann VII.
FSC 076	Hirth-Davreen Conflict (originally a Skreeln Civil War) expands to almost tear WebFed apart.
FSC 138-146	WebFed/Chezhrin First Contact and immediate Chezhrin War. Though bloody, this war resulted in a stalemate. Freeholders' First Contact with the Thalendri (and the worlds will never be the same).
FSC 158	First Contact between WebFed and both the Thalendri and Freeholders.
FSC 189	WebFed/Freehold border settled; WebFed formally annexes the Thalendri (formerly the Dreaming Stars District).
FSC 224	Contact between WebFed and Terran Empire; immediate wave of human immigration across the border into the Terran Border and Dreaming Stars District.
FSC 260	First Contact with the (molluskoid) Quellan.
FSC 265-276	Second Chezhrin War, also inconclusive.
FSC 300	The Quellan form an alliance with WebFed; Quellan realm becomes WebFed's Hylarond district.
FSC 332	DarkStar Trading Company formed.
FSC 382	DarkStar acquires Delphindri System, and begins construction of what will become Delphindri Shipyards.
FSC 417	First Contact with the Tlarin.
FSC 428	DarkStar purchases the Cytherean world of Kalian and begins reforming it.
FSC 448	Kalian now is becoming habitable and is renamed TradeWorld; it will become DarkStar's homeworld and company headquarters.
FSC 486	Kylil (the otteroid Selkies) discovered in a part of the Dreaming Stars which should have been surveyed a long time ago.
FSC 519	Discovery of the largest Elder Ones artifact: a rosette of artificial worlds in Shamballah system.
FSC 543	Nightflame Drive developed and monopolized by DarkStar.
FSC 550	Remains of Elder Ones starship (a giant bioengineered lifeform) found on the outer moon of Pepperland.
FSC 553-557	Third Chezhrin War; WebFed fleet pursuit blasts out a buffer zone, the Chezhrin Demilitarized Zone.
FSC 559	M'kranthi (feline) sky-city fleet found in DMZ by WebFed patrol units; they are resettled on the nearby Diadem Cluster to become the M'kranthi Diadem District.
FSC 577	Current date.

Originally, the timeline was much more detailed and tied in with our present calendar in a Future History. A space-opera like WebFed is best deliberately left "unstuck" in time and space — "A long time ago, in a galaxy far far away..."

ORGANIZATION

WebFed's structure is that of a federation; the WebFed itself is divided into Districts (ten at present), which are divided into subdistricts, which are divided into systems and worlds.

The central overgovernment is headed by a triumvirate of three Consuls, a holdover from the original three founders. Originally one Consul was K'thymri, one Larant, and one Skreeln, with the First Consulship rotated between the three. Presently the Consuls succeed one another from Third to Second to First Consul to retirement.

Under the Consuls is the WebFed Assembly, with subgroups representing worlds, districts/subdistricts, species, and general population (much like a four-house version of the U.S. Congress). It is said the Assembly's purpose is to work against itself and thus do nothing except in times of emergency.

MONEY

WebFed's basic monetary unit is the WebFed Credit Unit, almost always called the "WebCred". WebCredits are divided decimally, down to 1/1000th.

Local governments, private companies, and even wealthy individuals can mint their own money on a limited basis, like a milder version of the "wildcat banks" of 19th century America; private money (DarkStar Corporation's being the most common example) uses standard WebCred denominations, and is traded on exchanges like other commodities.

LAW AND JUDICIARY

WebFed's legal system varies from world to world; WebFed overcourts normally just review planetary/local courts and adjudicate directly only on interplanetary/interstellar affairs. Psionics (normally Larant) are in common use as truth-readers and telepathic interrogators. Local/planetary courts have primary jurisdiction within broad WebFed guidelines. Details of laws and procedure vary from species to species, planet to planet and even courts to court, but follow generic guidelines:

Property crimes are usually based on restitution; the offender pays back his victim, with interest. If he can't pay, he is indentured (usually to an exile world) to pay it off. Minor violent crimes use the same system, with monetary value determined by a "weregild" concept (though some worlds/cultures use corporal punishment/light torture). Major crimes usually result in exile to special worlds or reservations (usually nicknamed "prison planets", but are more accurately exile colonies).

Death sentences are known, but their frequency (and even their existence) vary by species, world, and culture: Thalendri hang for murder and rape; K'thymri drown for their most heinous crimes, Skreeln behead (or "make *Thrankari*") for great crimes and dishonors, and Rylli and Tlarin just exile permanently.

MILITARY

The WebFed military presence (honed by the three Chezhrin wars) has two major branches: the Navy (space combat) and the Marines (surface combat). "Army" technically refers to the planetary-level defense forces. The Navy also serves as deep-space police and the Marines serve as ship's troops aboard Naval vessels; each branch thinks of itself as the premier branch of service and the other as only a support function.

Ethnically, certain species are associated with specific branches or specialties: Larant as Navy, Skreeln (and lately male M'kranthi) as Marines, Thalendri as fighter pilots, and Quellan as engineers. Tlarin are very rarely (and Rylli never) found in military careers.

Uniforms are of similar cut but differ in branch colors: blue-black with gold trim for Navy and medium gray with black trim for Marines. Uniform regulations vary with species: K'thymri wear insignia-trimmed ponchos, Thalendri wear them human-cut but more baroque, M'kranthi wear simple tunic-cuts, and Skreeln, Larant, Quellan, and Tlarin wear only trim equipment in branch colors and markings.

GEOGRAPHY AND ETHNOGRAPHY

WebFed is located between the Terran and Chezhrin Empires. For a quick overview of its arrangement, imagine a map with "north" being at the top. To the "north" is the Chezhrin DMZ; to the "south", the Terran Empire. To the "east" is the New Suns Nebula and the "Grey Zone" of the independent minor worlds; to the "south" of the Grey Zone (and the "southeast" of the WebFed) is the independent Hibernian Freehold.

The WebFed is divided into ten administrative districts (corresponding to provinces); seven are detailed below. The remaining three are to the "west" of these, and do not enter into the projected stories (they're in reserve for anything that doesn't fit into the existing area). Most of the stories are set in and around the tradeworld and Dreaming Stars districts.

Most districts have a dominant ethnic species, with secondary populations of other species and minor-to trace-populations of still others. K'thymri, Larant, and Skreeln are found in at least minor numbers everywhere in the WebFed; M'kranthi and Tlarin are very rare outside of their home districts (Diadem and Hylarond, respectively). With these exceptions, generally a species is dominant within its home district, a secondary species in adjacent districts, and minor to trace numbers everywhere else.

TRIANGLE SYSTEMS DISTRICT: The original WebFed, centering around the original three homeworlds of Harkillian (K'thymri), Illauria (Larant), and N'kree (Skreeln); also contains Freeport (WebFed's closest approximation of a permanent capital world) and the (dark) Starshadow Nebula. This district is at the center of the present WebFed, and is the zero point for all directions in this section. Also called the "First District".

This district is the ethnic heartland of the K'thymri, Skreeln, and Larant peoples; other species have only minor populations.

TERRAN BORDER DISTRICT: "South" of the Triangle Systems District, this district borders the largely human Terran Empire. Most of WebFed's human population resides here and in the Dreaming Stars, a legacy of past emigration from the Terran Empire. Prominent worlds are **Fiddler's Green** (with its psionic research and training facilities), **Marketplace** (the commercial gateway to the Terran Empire), and **Pepperland** (Elder Ones archeological site).

DREAMING STARS DISTRICT: "Southeast" of the Triangle Systems, this district contains the Thalendri homeworld of **Cathuria**, the major Thalendri colony world of **Evergreen**, the system of **Murphy's World** with its unique biology, and the **Tiara Cluster**; beyond its border lies the human Hibernian Freehold.

This district is primarily Thalendri, with secondary Human and Rylia (Selkie) populations.

TRADEWORLD DISTRICT: "Northeast" of the Triangle Systems, this district centers around the cosmopolitan commercial center of **Tradeworld** (Kalian System), home of DarkStar Corporation. The district also contains the Rylia (Selkie) homeworld of **Thanandree** and the shipyards of the **Delphindri** System.

This district's population is a mix of Skreeln, Larant, Quellan, and Thalendri, with noticeable K'thymri, Human, Rylia, and Tlarin minorities (and even a few M'kranthi).

HYLAROND DISTRICT: An arm extending beyond the Tradeworld District, this district centers around the Quellan homeworld of **Hylardond**, and also contains the Tlarin homeworld of **Janarra**.

This district's majority ethnics are the Quellan and Tlarin, with the Quellan slightly outnumbering their Tlarin vassals.

CHEZHRIN BORDER DISTRICT: "North" of the Triangle Systems, this district extends to the Chezhrin DMZ. Owing to the three major wars across the DMZ, this district is heavily militarized.

Ethnically, this district is mostly Skreeln, with a secondary Larant population.

M'KRANTHI DIADEM DISTRICT: Newest of the WebFed's districts, the Diadem is tucked between the Tradeworld and Chezhrin Border district along the DMZ. This district was created about ten years ago to give autonomy to the recent M'kranthi settlements; like the Chezhrin Border, it is heavily fortified. Also known as the "Tenth District".

Ethnically, this district is almost exclusively M'kranthi.

The Tradeworld and Dreaming Stars districts are the setting for most of the WebFed stories, written and projected. All of Waverly's tales thus far have been set on Evergreen in the Dreaming Stars.

BEYOND THE BORDERS

Three major foreign interstellar governments (and one unclaimed

anarchy) border the WebFed along the area of interest: the Chezhrin Empire, the Grey Zone, the Hibernian Freehold, and the Terran Empire.

CHEZHRIN EMPIRE: Major interstellar government to the "north" of the WebFed, bordering on the Chezhrin Border and M'kranthi Diadem districts along the Chezhrin DMZ. Dominated by the Chezhrin, the Chezhrin Empire is viciously expansionist (race supremacy and slash-and-burn expansion on an interstellar scale), and has fought at least three major wars with the WebFed.

THE GREY ZONE: Unincorporated due "east" of the WebFed, bordering its Hylardon, Tradeworld, and Dreaming Stars districts and the Hibernian Freehold, and extending to the New Suns Nebula. A frontier zone of totally independent worlds, with much freebooting and general anarchy. The only "space pirates" in the area (independent privateers/mercenaries) operate in and along the Grey Zone. Prominent worlds are **Blue Monkey**, a major freeport with a navy of trusted privateers (and most of its planetary features named after "monkey" puns), and **Moreau**, center of genetic and bioengineering (both over and under the table).

HIBERNIAN FREEHOLD: Smaller, independent interstellar government "southeast" of the WebFed, adjoining its Dreaming Stars District. A loose federation of human-populated worlds, centered around the Irish/Japanese colonies of **Avalon**, **New Hibernia**, and **Yamato**. Originally an independent "lost" colony of the early Terran Empire; the Freeholders originally explored into what is now the Dreaming Stars and first contacted the Thalendri. When the Terran Empire expanded into the area and tried to annex the Freehold, the Freehold allied with the WebFed to counter the Empire, and has maintained its maverick independence by using WebFed and the Empire to balance each other off. New Hibernia itself has the most extensive human historical archives available to the WebFed.

Ethnically, the Freehold is "Freeholder Human", a distinct human ethnic type with Eurasian appearance and Irish coloration. Inhabitants are always referred to as "Freeholders"; Hibernian means strictly a human of Irish ancestry.

TERRAN EMPIRE: Major human-dominated interstellar government (centered around Earth) "south" of the WebFed, bordering its Terran Border and Dreaming Stars districts and (across a DMZ) the Hibernian Freehold. Generally good (if standoffish) relations with the WebFed; around 150 years ago (the "Hump" era), a hardnosed regime led to heavy emigration into the WebFed; these border-jumpers were the ancestors of WebFed's present human populations in the Terran Border and Dreaming Stars districts.

Except for the Grey Zone (and the mixed Grey Zone/Freeholder descent of Waverly's Chris Watson), these "foreign lands" stay pretty much offstage.

GENERIC GLOSSARY

ACADEMY: Generic term for higher education; equivalent to "college" or "university".

AETHER: Poetic term for space.

AETHERIC DRIVE: High-tech sublight anti-gravity spaceship drive; the Terran Empire uses the term "Plantier Drive".

ASTRAL DRIVE: Basic FTL starship drive, rated in "manifolds" of successively higher top speeds. Though superceded by the later NIGHTFLAME DRIVE, it is still used on slower civilian ships where speed is not important. The Terran Empire uses the term "Jump Drive".

A typical "slowboat" First-Manifold Astral drive takes about ten months to cross a full-sized WebFed District; a Sixth-Manifold Astral Drive (the fastest available before the Nightflame Drive) makes the same trip in seven weeks.

BENGA: Recreational/social drug and raw material for various pharmaceuticals; normally smoked when used socially. (*See the special entry on Benga later in this article.*)

BLACKBOX: Generic term for a maildrop or general data-storage media for transport on a courier ship.

CHAON: Synthetic foods, often used as part of a compound word; *chaon-noodles, chaon-beer, chaon-chips, chaon-cheese*, etc.

CID: Cerebral Interface Device or "sid"; direct brain interface data-link; a more sophisticated version of cyberpunk's "datajacks".

Two basic types of CID-set are in use: implant (the

classical, surgically-implanted jack) and induction (no brain hardwiring, like the final version of the headset from the movie "Brainstorm"; requires dedicated special pre-processors). The Terran Empire prefers the implant-jack; WebFed prefers the induction-set except for Quellan, whose brain structure requires the implant. CID-sets must be specifically tuned for the species using them (and sometimes further fine-tuned for subspecies or even individuals).

CID-sets are used for three main functions: control systems (such as vehicles), datafeed instruction, and direct interaction. Control systems is the simplest application; datafeed instruction is the highest-tech way of learning, but requires "labs" to practice the jacked-in knowledge or skill in order to retain it. Direct interaction is the most sophisticated use (creating a true cyborg, an organic-cybernetic symbiote), but requires special training and experience to use and direct tuning of the jack to the individual user for maximum throughput.

This little device, under the name of "data jack", is the symbol of the Cyberpunk genre of science fiction. Any future, high-tech universe must take such cyberware into account. The hard part is keeping it from dominating what is intended as a space-opera. My present solution is (1) In cyberpunk societies, the cyberware has usually come in faster than the society can absorb it - WebFed has had cybertech long enough that the aftershocks have died away; and (2) cyberpunk usually deals with "high-tech low-lives" in a very cynical world, and most of the emphasis in WebFed thusfar has been away from the Streets.

TRAVEL TIMES ON TYPICAL WEBFED STARSHIPS

"Slow" speeds refers to ordinary freighters and similar slowboats; "Medium" speeds are typical of fast freighters, passenger lines, and most military ships; "Fast" speeds are attainable only by small VIP transports, fast military ships, or dedicated mail/couriers.

		<u>ASTRAL DRIVE</u>	<u>NIGHTFLAME DRIVE</u>
ADJACENT STAR	Slow	4-7 days	2-7 days
	Medium	2-3 days	12 hours - 1 day
	Fast	24-36 hours	under 12 hours
TYPICAL IN-DISTRICT WORLD	Slow	1-2 months	2 weeks-2 months
	Medium	2-3 weeks	4-6 days
	Fast	9-11 days	3 days
CROSS-DISTRICT	Slow	5-9 months	3-9 months
	Medium	2-3 months	3-4 weeks
	Fast	45 days - 2 months	12 days

DARKSTAR TRADING COMPANY: Huge interstellar corporation; called "WebFed's Other Government" because of its size and state-within-a-state position.

NIGHTFLAME DRIVE: Current FTL starship drive with finer controllability, higher top speed, and better fuel economy than the **ASTRAL DRIVE**; also more expensive. Used on most military and the faster civilian ships; originated (and near-monopolized for many years) by DarkStar's Delphindri Shipyards.

First-Manifold Nightflame drives have no advantage over Astral Drives; a Second-Manifold Nightflame Drive takes about ten weeks to cross a full-sized WebFed District; a Fourth-Manifold Drive (the fastest generally available) takes about five weeks; a Fifth-Manifold Drive (the fastest available, used only for fast couriers) takes about twelve days.

SENTIENT INTERLINGUAL: WebFed's official standard

language; an artificial language, developed by the original three races at WebFed's founding, and constantly added to ever since. Also known as "Interlingual", "Web Interlingual", or "WebTalk".

SMARTCASE: A minaturized electronic office in a small briefcase; usually includes an integrated personal computer/mobile viewphone (with data transfer capability), stylus pad, various generic storage space, and sometimes a CID-set.

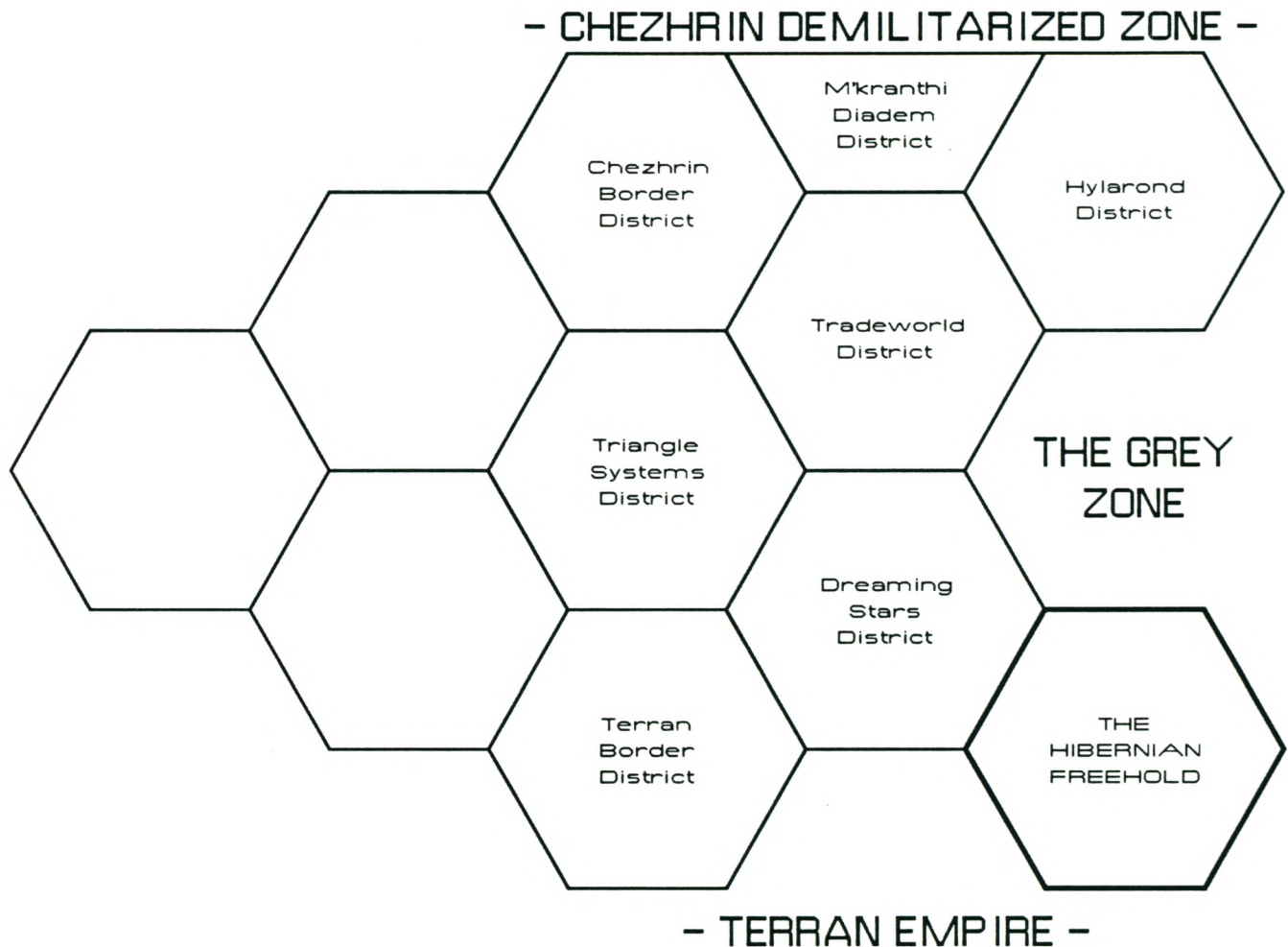
"**TERRIE**": From the Terran Empire, or a human.

TERRYMINT: Any mint originating on Earth; sometimes used as a flavoring cut for benga.

"**WEBBIE**": WebFed citizen or resident, or an individual of any WebFed-originated race.

WEBCRED: Common term for the standard WebFed monetary unit.

A MAP OF THE WEBFED



Thalendri

TWENTY-NTH CENTURY FOXES

According to Kurt, Thalendri originated as a total opposite of another local's vulpine race. They have evolved into one of WebFed's most-developed and popular critters.

Thalendri are the only Webbies to have appeared in YARF!, in Waverly Pierre's fiction in issues #3 and #6.

Thalendri, also known as "Foxcats" or "Fox-Elves", are a race of gracefully-slim, elegant humanoid foxes with a vaguely elven appearance.

Thalendri are about as tall as humans, with slim, human-proportioned bodies, short luxurious fur, and a foxlike head, face and ankle-length brush of a tail. Eyes are large, liquid, and catlike with slit pupils; long catlike whiskers (often cosmetically shaped) sweep down and back from the muzzle. The feet are five-toed and symmetrical, with the "big toe" in the center.

Fur color varies according to three distinct ethnic types:

RED THALENDRI (the most common) vary along a red-brown spectrum from vermilion to cinnamon color. Throat, chest, and tail-tip are usually a warm cream color.

GREY THALENDRI are a light-to-medium grey with either warm or cool off-white throat, chest, and tail-tip.

SILVERBLACK THALENDRI are jet-black with just enough white brindling to give rich highlights; throat, chest, and tail-tip are usually white or light grey. Silverblacks also tend to be taller than the other types (usually 6'4" or so for males, 6'0" for vixens).

Unlike Earth's foxes, Thalendri tend towards simple fur patterning; usually the white throat, chest, and tail-tip are the only difference from the base color. More complex fur trims exist ("masks", "gloves", muzzle trim), but are relatively rare.

Though Thalendri tend to breed (marry) within their own subspecies, crossbreeding (intermarriage) between grey and silverblack is relatively common, between red and grey rare, between red and silverblack very rare.

Eye color (for all subtypes) ranges from sapphire blue to emerald green to slate grey to amber and topaz browns.

Primary and secondary sexual characteristics parallel human. Males are "equipped" about five inches erect (despite the impression given by exaggerated codpieces); females (vixens) have slimmer shoulders, wider hips, and two human-like breasts.

Also paralleling humans, Thalendri are either right- or left-handed; unlike humans, they have about a 50-50 split between the two.

Thalendri voices are soft, with a default accent similar to French or a softer dialect of Russian; non-speech sounds are a canine repertoire of yips, yaps, loud coyote-like howls, and yelping shrieks of pain.

Thalendri are slimmer and lighter (and only about 80% as strong) as a human, but are slightly more dexterous. Their nervous systems transmit much faster than a human's giving them incredibly quick reflexes and reaction times—and more intense sensations of pain. Day vision is comparable to a human (with slightly less acute color perception), night vision is much better, and hearing is only slightly better (large trainable ears). Due to the nervous system, their senses of touch, taste, and smell are also much more acute than a human's (though taste and smell dropped to about human norms after benga smoking became the fashion).

Thalendri also have long natural lifespans; they age as a human until age 20, then their aging slows to a one-for-seven ratio. Not coincidentally, twenty is also the age of adulthood, celebrated with a formal coming-of-age. WebFed longevity treatments are based upon Thalendri biochemistry, and have no additional effect upon them.

Kurt was adamant about their one-for-seven aging; this gives them an average lifespan of about 350-400 years. I have misgivings about such a long lifespan compared to the other critters.

Another quirk of their bodies is the use of pheromone sexual signals (sort of an aphrodisiac-by-smell). Vixens' fertility is apparently regulated by pheromone signals from the surrounding population (the more around, the less fertile), making the birthrate self-regulating. These pheromones are indirectly responsible for the Thalendri reputation (among others) as sex maniacs. (Actually, the "philandering Thalendri" tend to be fairly monogamous.)

Since pheromones cannot be transmitted through media ("smello-vision" jokes notwithstanding), Thalendri entertainment media compensate with exaggerated "jiggle" titillations. A frivolous sexual proposition (without the pheromones to make it official) is the customary way to pay a compliment to the opposite sex. Plus, Thalendri have no overt nudity taboo (though public nudity is considered bad taste); clothes are primarily for decoration, pre-pubescent cubs normally go nude, and you can't really see anything through the fur. Oh, yes; Thalendri *do* tend to have a high sex drive—enough to keep their reputation from collapsing. The consequences in cultural misunderstandings can be imagined (especially since rape is a capital crime).

The Thalendri homeworld is **Cathuria** in the Dreaming Stars district of the WebFed, a slightly cooler and wetter near-twin of Earth; boreal bronzewood forests cover most of the

habitable areas on its single supercontinent. (Earth's closest equivalent is Northern California's redwood country, with added cycads and tree-ferns. Cathurian plants never developed prominent flowers; because of this, Thalendri can't get enough of off-world flowers.)

Thalendri were first contacted approximately 300 years ago by humans of the Hibernian Freehold, when their civilization (around the continent's inland seas) was just emerging into a Renaissance level of feudal development. There followed many wild and crazy years of culture shock and upheaval, fortunes won and lost overnight, and swashbuckler-style freebooting. Just as this reached its peak, WebFed enforced its outstanding territorial claims to the Dreaming Stars and annexed/absorbed the Thalendri. When things finally stabilized (at least, as well as they would ever), Thalendri civilization had reached (for better or worse) its present form.

With the wild times between Freeholder and WebFed contact, Thalendri developed a taste for flash and money; many became merchants (often married into the established nobility) and/or adventurers.

Thalendri are extremely fashion-conscious, wearing clothing and decorating their living spaces in a multi-cultural imitation of older human cultures (copped from the extensive Freeholder archives of old entertainment videos). The choice of (usually Western) human culture as a basis reflects their initial contact and subsequent saturation with human culture

via the Freeholders.

Thalendri fashion freely mixes the styles of different cultures and historical periods with a Baroque sense of decoration and eye-blasting colors, somehow making the resulting pastiche look like it all belongs together. Examples are the "Renaissance Flapper" vixen's evening wear, "Rhinstone Cowfox with Lace" male's business suits, and "Art Deco/Baroque" architecture and interior decor.

Despite their "culture cloning with a twist", Thalendri maintain many pre-contact traditions—such as always issuing money in coin form (in all standard WebFed denominations), keeping their social class structure pretty much intact, and sleeping (among other things) in large circular beds with full curtains (to simulate a den).

Thalendri are moderate carnivores, raising *bodashi* for their meat and eggs. Typical cooking involves *bodashi* cuts in sauces and/or elaborate omelets, usually seasoned with native and offworld herbs. (Since *benga* (see below) caught on, their food seasonings have gone from delicate to moderate.) Preferred alcoholic drinks are wines, brandies, and sherries (they do not drink hard liquor); nonalcoholic drinks are fruit-based or herbal teas.

Thalendri picked up *benga* as an additional social drug from their Freehold contact, and are responsible for spreading its use to other WebFed races. They commonly take in as smoke (half of all Thalendri are regular smokers, with an additional



quarter occasional users), preferring cigarettes in stylishly-long holders or elaborate pipes; herbal bengal tea is used by the non-smoking population.

Thalendri tend not to be a violent people; they are usually much afraid of death, especially violent death. When faced with the latter, they have four basic responses: quiet catatonic coward, loud squirmy coward, berserk panic escape, or (the rarest, and only if cornered) berserk fighting back in panic.

Because of their reaction speed and agility, they make excellent combat pilots (so long as they don't see any blood or death, just blips on a screen, or war machines without visible crew).

Despite this distaste for violence, their upper classes have a ceremonial dueling tradition, using the rapier and dagger in a stylized show of force unto submission. Their distaste for violence also does not extend to animals; big-game hunting (traditionally from *fyaltaback*, using a lance-like *gildarr-spear*) is a prestige thing among males who can afford it. In addition, Thalendri have an unarmed martial art, *Satra Khal*, which is described later.

The major Thalendri religion worships a Godhead composed of a God and Goddess, who circle each other in a neverending waltz-like dance which spirals out to create and maintain the universe.

The God (depicted as a male with white fur and golden eyes, and symbolized with an arrow) represents masculinity, entropy, autumn, winter, death, and regeneration. Priests are consecrated to the God, and wear vestments of brown and gold.

The Goddess (depicted as a vixen with white fur and golden eyes, and symbolized by a bow) represents femininity, creation, spring, summer, life, and sunlight. Priestesses are consecrated to the Goddess, and wear vestments of green and silver.

The principle of evil is personified in *Shuuth*, the Thalendri Satan. *Shuuth* manifests as a hermaphrodite (perverting the male/female duality of the God and Goddess), black-furred Thalendri with crimson eyes, throat, chest, and tailtip. Homosexuality (rare among Thalendri) is equated with devil-worship, or possession.

Salvation ("Joining the Dance" for sudden conversions or "Learning the Dance" for gradual catechism) involves joining the God and Goddess with a place in the eternal dance, both before and after death. Damnation ("*Shuuth's* embrace", the Thalendri Hell) involves being eternally raped and eaten by the insatiable *Shuuth* in an endless nothingness.

Worship is elaborate and formalized, with liturgical complexity approaching that of a Tridentine High Mass. A priest and priestess (often a married couple) function as a team for most of the liturgies (such as comings-of-age, weddings, and routine worship). The priestess celebrates alone those rites dealing with new life (such as the birth of a cub) and the priest celebrates alone at any rite dealing with death (such as a funeral). During such solo rites, the opposite-sex clergy of the team secludes him/herself for the day.

Temples and chapels are usually shaped like "theaters in the round", with a centrally-located raised dais (surfaced in wood parquet whenever possible) in the center for the waltz-like sacred dances (imitating the God and Goddess in the person of the priest and priestess) that form the central part of the liturgy. Whenever possible, freestanding temples are set amid specially-landscaped groves to give the effect of a forest clearing.

Thalendri clergy practice a unique unarmed martial art called *Satra Khal*, similar to Aikido plus Karate plus folk chiropractic plus knowledge of Thalendri accupressure points to either incapacitate an opponent or to relieve pain. Most Thalendri medical students customarily train in basic *Satra Khal* for both traditional and practical reasons. Legend has it that a *Satra Khal* master can after centuries of mastery drop an opponent or deliver healing pressure at a distance through their mind alone.

This is what first intrigued me about Kurt's critters—he'd worked out organized religions for most of them. This is an often-neglected facet of most fan-originated critters or universes.

The God/Goddess duality carries over into the Thalendri sexual attitudes (male and female are co-equal and complementary, but *different*), language (all nouns are gendered "he" or "she"—"it" is used only as an insult), and inheritance customs (sons inherit from the father, daughters from the mother, with little or no joint property).

As mentioned before, Thalendri are not a violent people. When lethal violence is required, such is the task of the *Sukesh*. Somber notes of the eternal dance, *Sukeshdri* are specifically consecrated to kill by a priest, and require an annual retreat to clean the blood from their souls. The custom provides a legal outlet for the more violence-prone Thalendri.

Thalendri normally bury their dead, and mark the grave by planting a tree directly over the body. Funeral colors are black trimmed with red (darkness and blood—the colors of death).

Thalendri still have a hereditary nobility: the *Vanthdri* (greater barons) and *Nimvanthdri* (lesser barons), who through marriage, inheritance, mercantilism, or luck retained their position through the shift from feudal to post-feudal culture.

Law is still (officially) the right of the baronial families, though their role is by now ceremonial with one grim exception. Thalendri custom mandates death sentences for murder and rape, subject of course to WebFed overgovernment review. (Extradition of non-Thalendri is almost always honored, and has saved the lives of uncounted humans who misinterpreted the local sexual customs.) Executions are by public hanging at sunrise in a public square (a broken-necked clean kill for simple murder, with "slow hanging" for rapists and the real slimeballs), with the body left dangling until sunset; the idea behind retaining such a low-tech method is that killing is a serious and grotesque business, and should not be sanitized away. Since only the baronial family has the right to kill within their holdings, a member of the baronial family must supervise



each hanging.

Thalendri have two standard languages: *Telemdra* ("Highspeech") and *Davvashi* ("Lowspeech"). *Telemdra* is the formal court language of the old *Tulvanthdri* (royalty; a term fallen into disuse), and is used for formal records, high society, and religious liturgies; *Davvashi* (originally a *Telemdra*-based trade pidgin) is the common language, with about 50% commonality with *Telemdra*. (Think of *Telemdra* as Latin and *Davvashi* as Spanish or Italian.) Both languages use the same alphabet, similar in appearance to an italic version of J.R.R. Tolkien's "Tengwar" Elvish in The Lord of the Rings.

To represent Thalendri speech in English, always gender the nouns and pronouns as male or female. Gender is usually determined by the attributes of the God or Goddess (creation, growth, life, and healing are female; destruction, stability, death, and decline are male). For nouns, always use a gendered form (such as actor/actress, doctor, doctress, hunter/huntress); always use "vixen" for "woman", but use "male" for "man" if stand-alone and "fox" for "man" only as part of a compound word (a male who delivers mail is a "mailfox", a female is a "mailvixen"). If the gender is unknown or mixed (within a group noun), the gender defaults to male or female. If a foreign word incorporates a glottal stop ('), substitute a schwaed vowel (usually "a" or "i"). To render *Telemdra*, use elaborate, formal language, with poetic imagery of the eternal dance.

To coin Thalendri words, use the phonemes (sounds of letters) of the Cyrillic (Russian) alphabet, with the addition of doubled consonants and "TH" replacing "SHCH".

With their history, personal and family names vary widely, borrowing extensively from other cultures (usually archaic human).

Personal names come first, and are of one to three syllables with feminine names usually ending in "a". Examples: Koruth, Shelain, Tavarr, Erique, Gaspard, Dushain, Davvan, Telemon, Tovval, Yovvan; Maya, Nimaya, Mara, Ankhaya, Dushaya, Khrysha, Chandarra, Nadya, Sazha, Shelanna, Tavvaya, Varra, Yovanna, Valsha, Sharra, Maisha, Ilya, Jenna, Telka, Marta, Anielia.

Family names are normally native Thalendri and single-syllable in their male form, with the prefix *Nimvanth-* for lesser and *Vanth-* for greater baronial families; sometimes the diminutive prefix *nim-* is used for a minor branch or a lesser family of the same name. Family names are fully gendered; vixens use the feminine *-ai* ending; if a prefix is used, it will be gendered instead of the base name. Examples: Vanth-Krann (Vanthai-Krann), Nimvanth-Tulan (Nomvanthai-Tulan), Zann (Zannai), Zorr (Zorrai), Flinn (Flinnai), Vash (Vasshai), nim-Tazral (nimai-Tazral), Lyss (Lyssai), Vulthann (Vulthannai), Nimvanth-Riian (Nimvanthai-Riian), Vanth-Galt (Vanthai-Galt), Nimvanth-Kazha (Nimvanthai-Kazha), Vul (Vulai), Haiut (Haiutai), Paal (Paalai), Tym (Tymai).

One special exception for Baronial family names: If the base name ends in "a" or "ai", the baronial descent and title is traced through the daughters; if not, though the sons. In marriages, a Baronial name always supersedes a non-baronial name, and a *Vanth* supersedes a *Nimvanth*; other than this, they have no fixed custom for married names.

THALENDRI GLOSSARY
(both Telemdra and Davvashi)

-AI: Feminine singular ending (suffix).
BASTORAI: Thalendri cookstove, based on a heated stone slab originally used as a griddle.
BODASHI: Food animal, raised for eggs and meat; a dinosaurid wallaby. Plural *bodashdri*.
BRONZEWOOD: Major dominant tree of Cathuria's forests; much like a Sequoia Redwood.
CASSAI: Floor lounge, an all-purpose piece of seating furniture found in even the most humanophile *hashadrai*. Plural *cassadrai*.
"CITADEL": Downtown; a major city center. Many cities on Cathuria originated as castle towns around a baronial stronghold.
DAVVASHI: "Lowspeech", the most widespread Thalendri language.
-DRI: Masculine plural ending (suffix)
-DRAI: Feminine plural ending (suffix).
"-FOX": Male Thalendri (translation); used only when part of a compound word.
FYALTA: Para-therapsid riding animal, like an iguanadon with dark coppery fur; some breeds have hadrosaur-like crests.
GILDARR: "Cathurian bear", a very aggressive grizzly-like predator.
GILDARR-SPEAR: A long, lance-like spear with a crossbar (similar to a boarspear) behind the large broadhead; an archaic big-game hunter's weapon.
HASHA: A Thalendri home, usually referring to the traditional style built half-buried into a slope or with an earth-bermed exterior, but can refer to human-style houses or any living quarters. Plural *hashadrai*.
HUMANDRI: Davvashi plural for humans.
LITRAI: Wind instrument, like a cross between a flute and an oboe. Because of their mouth structure, Thalendri wind instruments have to use woodwind-like reed mouthpieces.
"THE MARK OF SHUUTH": Homosexuality or hermaphroditism. Not applied if the life-form is fundamentally different, such as the hermaphrodite molluskoid Quellan.
MIKALL: Literally "Dancer"; one who is sacred, special, or set apart by special talents or purpose in life.
MIKALAI: Feminine form of *mikall*.
NIM-: Small, lesser, junior (diminutive prefix).
NIMSHUUTH: Demon (literally, "lesser Shuuth")

NIMVANTH: "Lesser Baron"; the lowest rank of nobility, equivalent to a landed knight or baronet.
NIMSHUUTHAI: Demones.
SHIL: Hard money, coins; plural *shildri*. Thalendri always mint money in coin form.
SHUUTH: The Devil, principle of evil and destruction.
"SHUUTH'S EMBRACE": Hell.
"SLICKSKIN": Human; or any non-furry, non-scaly, non-feathery race.
SUKESH: "Violent crazy"; used of a Thalendri specifically consecrated to a profession involving heavy violence. Telemdra spelling *tsukesh*.
SUKESHAI: Female *sukesh*.
TELEMDRA: "Highspeech"; the archaic, formal Thalendri language, spoken by *Vanthdri* and the well-educated; used for religious liturgies and formal records.
THORNFruit: "Cathurian pineapple"
TUL-: Large, great, senior (prefix)
TULVANTH: "Great Baron"; generically, royalty.
VANTH: Baron; generically, any nobility.
VANTHAI: Baroness; generically, any noblevixen.
"VIXEN": Female Thalendri (translation)



BENGA

or

WHAT IS THAT VIXEN SMOKING?

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Jerry's original concept of benga was a non-carcinogenic pseudo-tobacco. This implies many other properties, which are elaborated below. Like tobacco in the 17th to mid-20th centuries, benga is a stylish social drug and a major cash crop.

A common recreational drug, Benga is an herbal incense originating somewhere on the other side of the Freehold (presumably, in some part of the multiverse run by Mr. Collins). Used as a social drug and as the raw material for various pharmaceuticals (tranquilizers, antiemetic, immunologicals, and especially anticarcinogens). This versatility has made benga a major cash crop. (Yes, you can synthesize the active pharmaceutical components; it's just cheaper to grow the plant and process the leaf.)

Raw benga leaves look like a small (4" x 7" average) tobacco leaf with serrated edges similar to a marijuana leaf. Recreationally, it may be drunk as herbal tea, burned as incense (giving a pleasant cinnamon-clove aroma), or smoked (giving the fastest and strongest effects). Normal benga produces a mild euphoria (described as "a pleasant tickle to the pleasure center"), with an additional mild stimulant or tranquilizer effect.

Unlike tobacco or marijuana, smoking benga is not physically addictive or carcinogenic; the main health hazard in the smoke is carbon monoxide. A typical long-term benga smoker uses three or four times a day (often in connection with some other activity, such as after-dinner or when being groomed), spaced widely enough to allow the lungs to recover in between.

Benga is classified by three characteristics: Effect, Ph., and Potency. All three of these effects bear a numerical rating, from 1 to 9, depending on the intensity of the effect. These ratings, by governmental mandate, appear on all benga packaging.

- Effect** varies from tranquilizer to stimulant, in addition to the pleasure-center tickle. The numerical rating associated with Effect goes from 1 (strong tranquilizer) to 9 (potent stimulant).
- Ph.** varies from alkaline "rush blends" (intense effect, the tea tastes like tonic water and the smoke like hot air, with very little aroma) to acidic "taste blends" (very mild effect, pleasant sweet-and-sour spicy taste as both tea and smoke, with a very pronounced

cinnamon-clove-incense aroma). The numeric value associated with Ph. varies from 1 (strongly alkaline) to 9 (strongly acidic).

Using a tobacco analogy, rush blends are like cigarette tobacco, inhaled completely into the lungs for the effect; taste blends are like fine cigar or pipe tobacco, sipped into and held in the mouth for the taste and a mild mouth-absorption buzz.

Potency measures the strength of the overall effect, aroma, and taste; rush blends will have a stronger effect than taste blends of the same potency. The number here ranges from 1 (mild overall effect) to 9 (highly concentrated effect).

A typical blend for smoking is a moderate tranq/taste blend of average potency--Silverfox Blend's "Argent 150's" (classification: 275) in about this range are Cathuria's best-selling cigarette. Other legendary blends include "Cathuria Gold" (classification : 119; the ultimate high-potency tranq/rush blend), "Maniac's Blend" (classification: 919; the ultimate high-potency stim/rush blend), "Coward's Blend" (classification: 551; a minimal-potency blend used by Thalendri who smoke just to look fashionable), and "China Tea" (classification : 883; a light stim/taste blend normally used as herb tea).

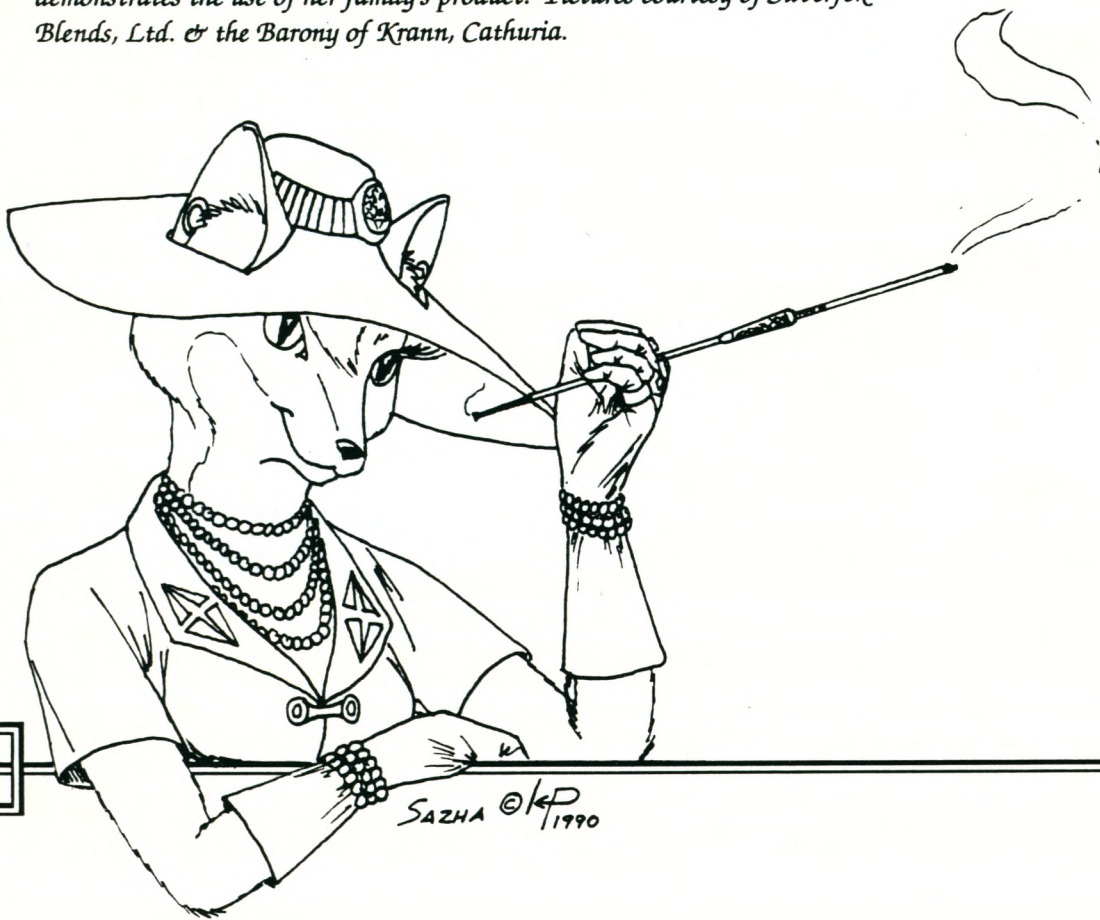
Benga is smoked in conventional forms; pipes or cigarettes (benga leaves are too small to make into proper cigars). Benga cigarettes typically run about 150mm long, and take over fifteen minutes to smoke; the taste-blend ones are more like fine cigars in cigarette form. Cigarette holders are near-universal among furry smokers, with long elaborate holders being almost a Thalendri trademark.

Thalendri are responsible for introducing benga to the WebFed, picking up the practice from the Freeholders (who had presumably been introduced to it by someone else). Upon WebFed contact, the Thalendri spread benga smoking first throughout their own culture, then to other WebFed peoples.

With Benga, a furry can smoke in moderation without adverse effects on his/her health. A pipe or long cigarette holder provides a convenient prop for portraits or theatrical gestures, and echoes the 1920's glamour schtick which had a major influence on WebFed's background atmosphere.



Miss Sazha Vanthai-Krann, whose family made its fortune in Benga, demonstrates the use of her family's product. Pictures courtesy of Silverfox Blends, Ltd. & the Barony of Krann, Cathuria.

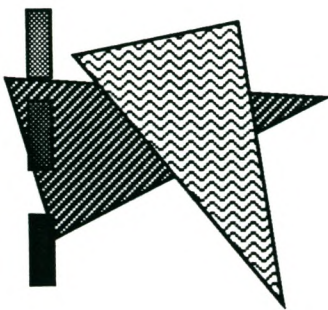


REYNOLDS' RAT GOES HOLLYWOOD

Reynolds, the mascot of the 1984 World Science Fiction Convention in Los Angeles (L.A.con II), has been re-anthropomorphized for Los Angeles' new bid for the 1996 Worldcon (L.A.con III).



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The Last Bits

DISPATCHES FROM THE ELECTRONIC FRONT

The big news here is the demise of the Rowrbrazzle BBS, run by Dwight Dutton. Dwight is a Captain in the U.S. Army Reserves, and has been called to duty due to the recent events in the Persian Gulf... running a BBS while picking sand out of one's boots is kind of difficult.

We at YARF! wish Captain Dutton a safe tour of duty, and a quick return home.



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