

Issue Nine

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# YARF!

THE • JOURNAL • OF • APPLIED • ANTHROPOMORPHICS



Auld Lang Syne

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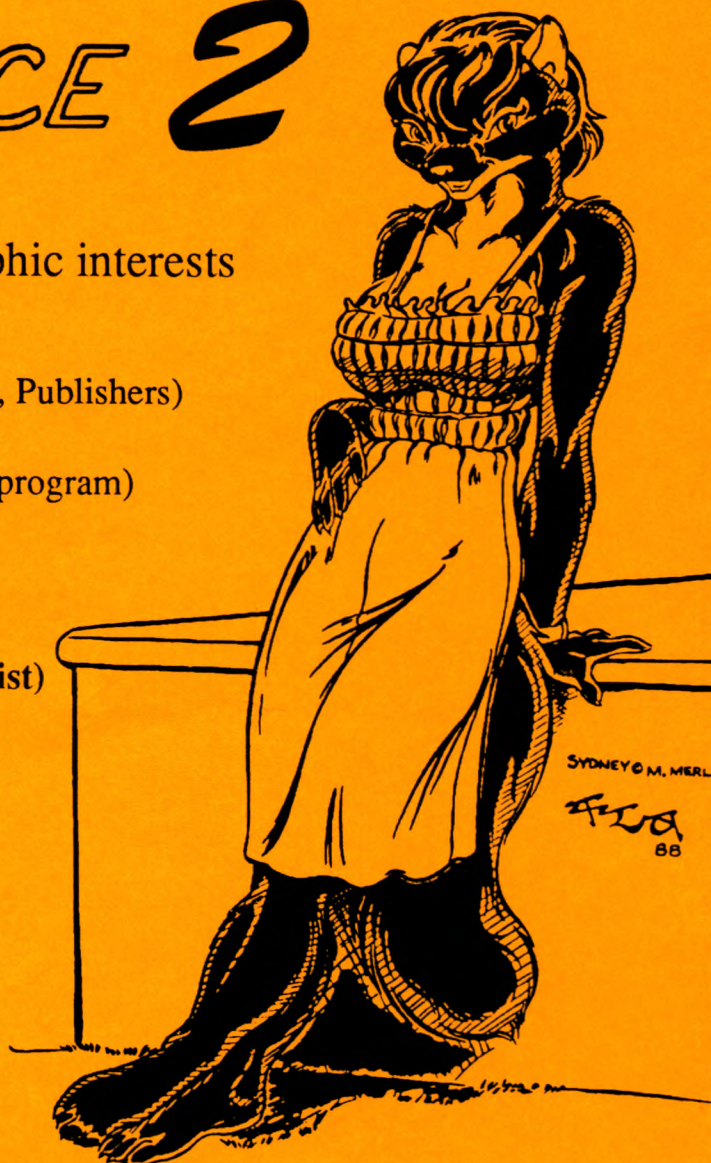


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# Flaming Hairballs

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

Welcome back to the circus. In the center ring...

The making of this issue has been a bit on the unusual side. With the double-sized #10 issue looming before us, decisions of what to put in this issue, and what to save for January. We stopped just short of drawing straws. What we DID end up with, is an even balance of comics and fiction. *Bon appetit.*

A few brief items we should cover:

**BELATED THANKS DEPARTMENT:** To Zjonni Perchalski, for good work under difficult circumstances on the Gift of Fire, Gift of Blood serialized novella.

**TASTE OF THINGS TO COME DEPARTMENT:** This issue begins the publication of "Cyborg Kangaroo", a daily comic by Dave "Elvis Ate My Homework" Kuhn and Adam "That Was a BUG?" Van Wyk. See the item itself for its history... "Cyborg Kangaroo" should be with us for about a year.

**NEVER THE SAME PRICE TWICE DEPARTMENT:** Current back issue prices are:

Issue 1	\$4.00
Issues 2-4	\$3.00
Issues 5, 6	\$4.00
Issues 7, 8	\$3.00

**SAY IT AGAIN, SAM DEPARTMENT:** Once again, it is time to restate our editorial guidelines. YARF!'s goal is to present the best anthropomorphic material we can find, in a format which presents the fandom in the best possible light. To that end, we once again present YARF's editorial policy:

- The quality of a submission shall be the most important factor in deciding which pieces see print. We do our best to be impartial.
- Sexual content must be carefully handled. YARF! is not a venue for pornography, and works of an erotic nature must be tastefully handled.
- Violence in a submission should not be of a gratuitous nature. Such violence should be either within the context of the piece (such as in Empires) or from a humorous point of view such as "OH! My Eye!" in this issue).
- The YARF! editorial staff will be the final judges of what goes into YARF!.

And that's the name of *that* tune.

Ah, but what of the future?

Our next issue is going to be something special. Our target is a hundred pages, and it'll be nothing but the best. Comics, fiction, articles—it'll all be there. A new comic series, "Escape To New York" by Roz Gibson, will begin its five-issue run... "Feasts and Famines", a feature-length story by Waverly Pierre... gallery-quality cover art from Eric Blumrich... Empires continues its story with the addition of a new "wild card" into the plot... a sobering piece by Mark Stanley which examines the price of progress... and more, more, more...

## DEADLINES...DEADLINES...DEADLINES

You'd be disappointed if we didn't do this, admit it.

Issue 10	January 12, 1991 (ConFurence issue, double-sized. \$5.00 cover price)
Issue 11	February 23, 1991
Issue 12	April 6, 1991
Issue 13	May 18, 1991
Issue 14	June 22, 1991 (San Diego Comic Con issue, double-sized. \$5.00 cover price)
Issue 15	August 10, 1991
Issue 16	September 21, 1991
Issue 17	November 2, 1991
Issue 18	December 14, 1991



# Patten's Pontifications

## Book Review: Rememory

Reviewed by Fred Patten

Rememory, by John Betancourt. New York, Popular Library/Questar, October 1990, 197 pages, \$4.95; ISBN 0-445-2045-1.

This is a cross between "BladeRunner" and "Total Recall", a fast-moving cyberpunk thriller set in a depressing future. The story, full of violent crime and political terrorism, is forgettable. What is memorable is the glimpse of new bio-engineered societies that combine aspects of racial minorities, religious sects, and urban super-gangs.

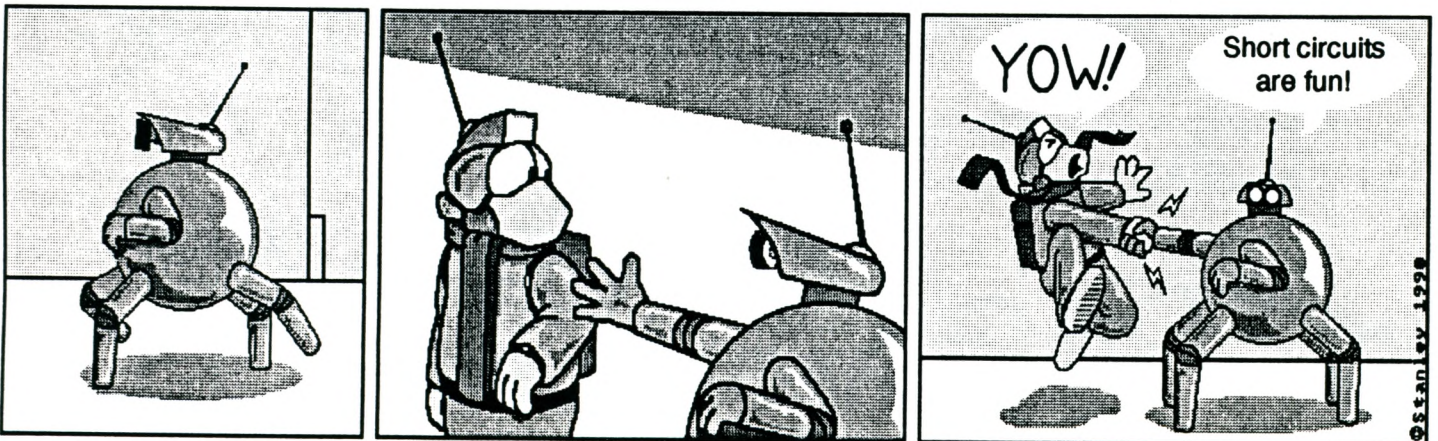
There is superpollution to the degree that nose filters are needed to breathe in the streets. Aircars fly through the skies, but it costs \$500 for three hours at a parking meter. Individual police forces have been absorbed into the SecurNet, a Gestapo that ruthlessly enforces national public order. Major government offices have become hereditary, although the pretense of democracy is still maintained.

People are dropping out of this society through bioengineering. It began a couple of generations earlier as cosmetic surgery. It has evolved into the rejection of a human race which no longer offers anything to the individual, and the development of new artificial species that promise family and brotherhood. New ghettos have formed for peoples such as the techs, proud of all their mechanical implants; the glitterfolk, pleasure-seekers who flaunt flashing electronics and neon body-parts; and especially the animalforms such as the catmen, the dogmen, the penguinmen, and others who have turned themselves into their chosen totem animals.

Slasher, Hangman, and Jeffy are three catmen criminals who specialize in robbing dogmen, the rivals of the cats. As the novel follows them, it flashes past intriguing details of the catmen and dogmen societies, with passing references to other animes. There are bodyshops such as Animen-R-U's, where humans can get themselves converted. Conversion used to be an individual adult choice, but now that animen communities have developed, parents have their children converted as soon after birth as possible. Catmen and dogmen can transform themselves at will, were-animal style, between a human bipedal posture and an animal quadrupedal stance. Animen adults have enhanced muscles and steel claws; children have plastic practice claws. Bioengineered body forms establish the basic feline or canine structure, including head-shape, fangs, claws, tail, and so on; but the skin and body fur are easily interchangeable. A catman can appear as a tiger, a leopard, a cougar, a cheetah, a man-sized Siamese cat, or just about any other feline almost as easily as a human can change clothes. There can also be hybrids, such as a dogman smuggler with the head of a Doberman and the body of a wolf or a husky.

Rememory is worth reading for these glimpses of animan life, and for the semi-pathetic, semi-psychotic movement among the animen to deny their humanity and proclaim their adherence to their free animal nature, at the same time that they are developing their own political corruption and their own brutal Gestapo, the Shadowcats. The plot is for those who enjoy lots of blow-'em-up, shoot-'em-down action, chase scenes, and cynical double-crosses. ☺

## Freefall by Mark Stanley



# What the heck is Cyborg Kangaroo?

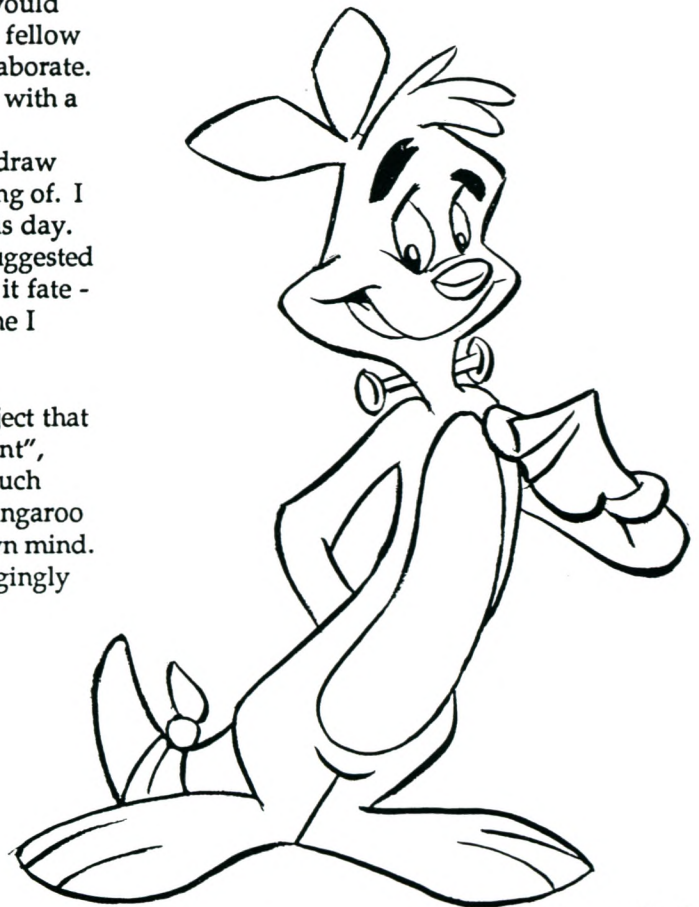
I've gotten asked that question more times than I can count, although not always the same way. Usually "fuck" replaces "heck." By common consensus, my mumbled responses have never adequately answered it. Well, against all common sense, here goes.

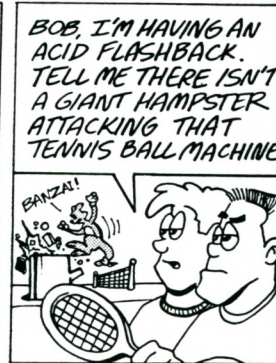
Back in my sophomore year of college I did a weekly comic strip for USC's Daily Trojan newspaper (circulation: 12,000 - actually readership: 3.) Although it was well received, I found it was tragically impossible to sustain a story line that took seven days to get to the next episode. So why not do a daily strip? Since I already knew my next semester was going to be the hardest of any I had taken or would take, in which I'd be required to turn in two complete film projects, would average about 5 hours of sleep (on a good night), be committed to working weekends, and have no free time to speak of, I naturally seized the opportunity.

Upon reaching my later-to-be-much-regretted decision, I took steps to insure that the as-yet-unnamed strip would actually appear every day; I asked good friend and fellow cartoonist Adam Van Wyk if he might want to collaborate. After he stopped laughing, we sat down to come up with a concept. Together we hit upon a superb story with wonderful, funny characters that we'd both love to draw and people would cherish and demand merchandising of. I promptly rejected the idea for reasons unclear to this day. So we resumed brainstorming. As a joke, ol' Adam suggested we do a strip called "Cyborg Kangaroo." Well call it fate - - better still call it blind stupidity - - but God help me I never realized he was joking.

So we embarked with foolish fervor upon a project that has been at various times been described as "brilliant", "insightful", and "wonderfully moving." Usually such descriptions are preceded by the phrase "Cyborg Kangaroo is anything but..." I'll allow you to make up your own mind. I've picked 50 of the strips that humor experts grudgingly concede might be considered remotely funny.

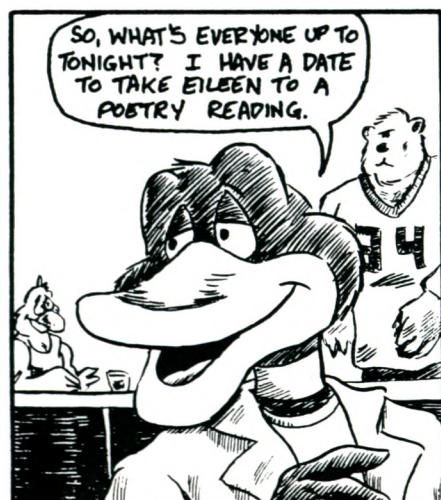
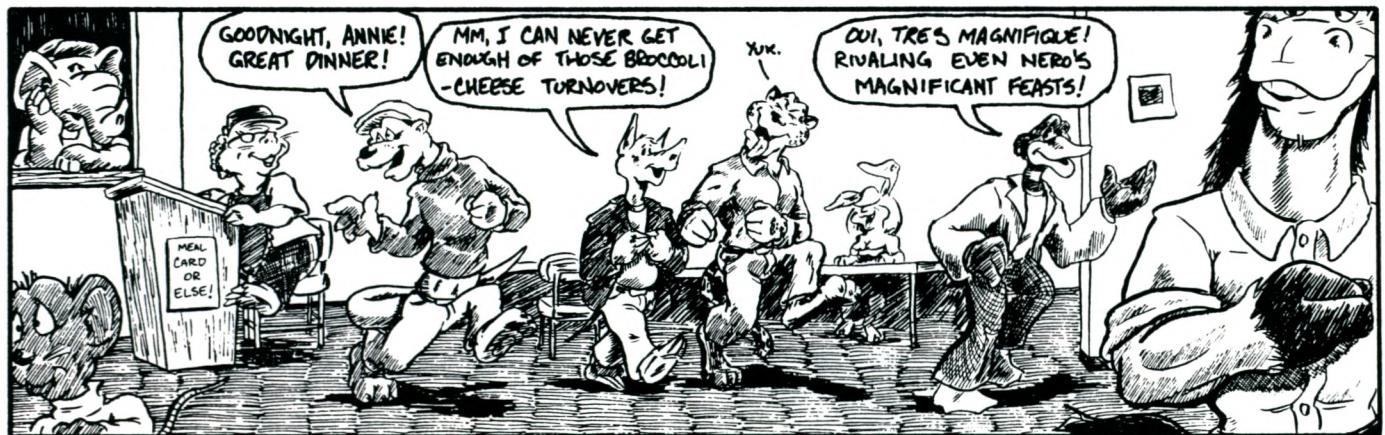
Here's the first week. Hope you enjoy.

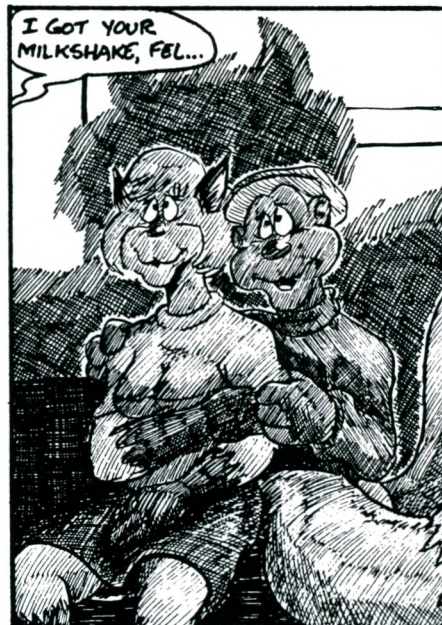
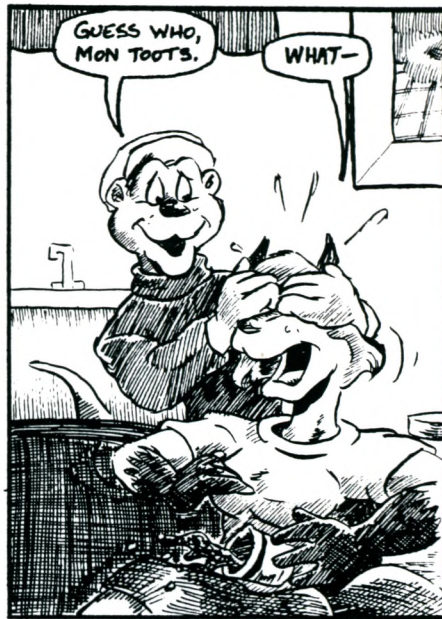




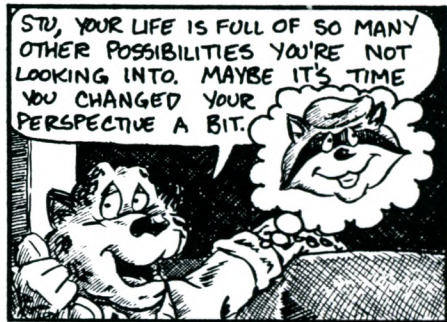
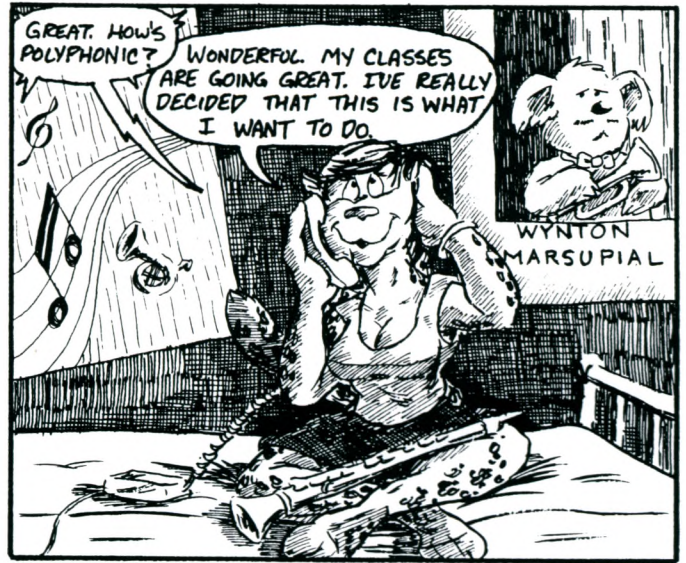


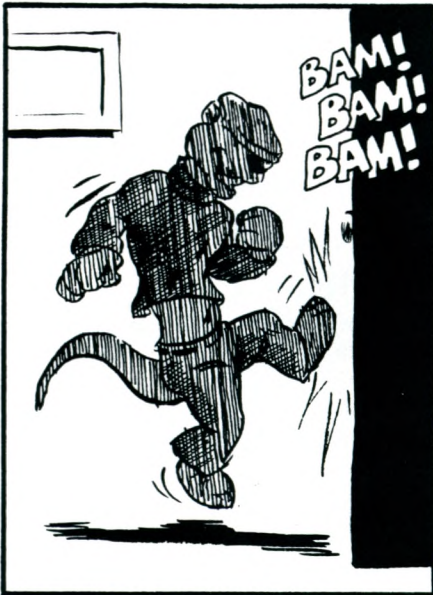
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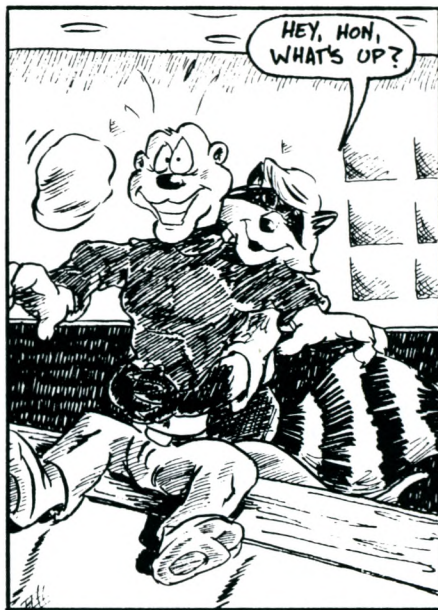






SHORTLY... OH, SHOULD I TELL FELICIA? OR SHOULDN'T...

PFT



HEY, HON, WHAT'S UP?



JEER, LAY OFF, WILL YA? YOU STARTLED ME.

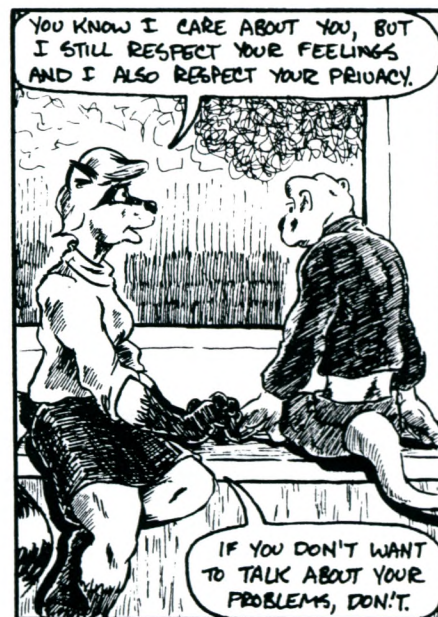


I'M SORRY. WHAT'S THE MATTER?

OH, IT'S NOTHING.



OH, STUART...

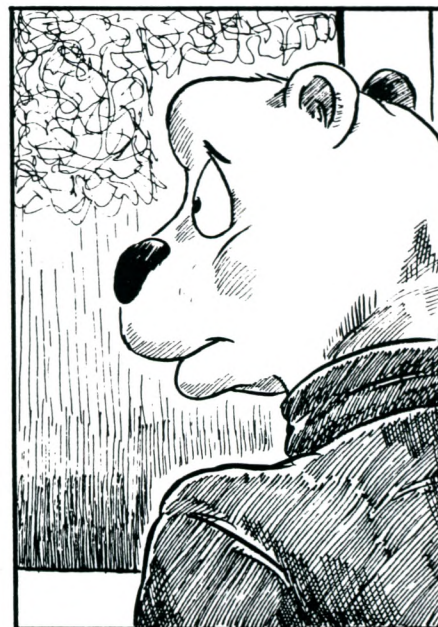


YOU KNOW I CARE ABOUT YOU, BUT I STILL RESPECT YOUR FEELINGS AND I ALSO RESPECT YOUR PRIVACY.

IF YOU DON'T WANT TO TALK ABOUT YOUR PROBLEMS, DON'T.



BUT DON'T FORGET THAT I'M HERE, EITHER, AND I'M STILL YOUR FRIEND. I'LL LISTEN, IF YOU WANT TO TALK.



THANKS, SARAH. I WON'T FORGET.

AND SO THIS VIGNETTE IS CONCLUDED... WITH KNOWLEDGE THAT LIFE ON THE WHOLE NEVER REALLY REACHES AN...

End..

# "Just a Christmas Song..."

Story ©1990 by Brad Rogers  
Art ©1990 by John Nunnemacher



SAAANTA CLAUSE IS COMIN' TO TOWN... SAAANTA CLAUS IS COMIN' TO TOWN...

I WOULDN'T WANT TO BELONG TO ANY CLUB THAT WOULD HAVE ME AS A MEMBER.



HOW'S THE PRACTICING GOING, GODFREY? I HAVEN'T HEARD MUCH MUSIC COMING FROM YOUR DIRECTION.

OH, OKAY. I'M JUST TAKING A BREAK.



LOOK, GADFLY, THE CHRISTMAS TALENT SHOW IS IN TWO DAYS, AND WE HAVE THAT CAROLLING EXCURSION PLANNED FOR SATURDAY. YOU'VE GOT TO LEARN MORE THAN "A CHRISTMAS SONG" BY JETHRO BULL.



I WILL. DON'T WORRY YOUR POINTED LITTLE NOSE OFF. CHRISTMAS SONGS ARE EASY. BESIDES, NO ONE WILL BE ABLE TO HEAR THIS MANDOLIN OVER YOUR MONSTER GIBSON, MUCH LESS THE REST OF THE BAND.



THEY'LL HEAR IF YOU PLAY THE WRONG NOTES. I'M RUNNING OUT TO PICK UP SOME LAST-MINUTE THINGS. YOU'D BETTER WORK ON LEARNING THE SONG LIST.



OH, ALRIGHT.

CLICK

SO THIS IS CHRISTMAS...

SPRANG



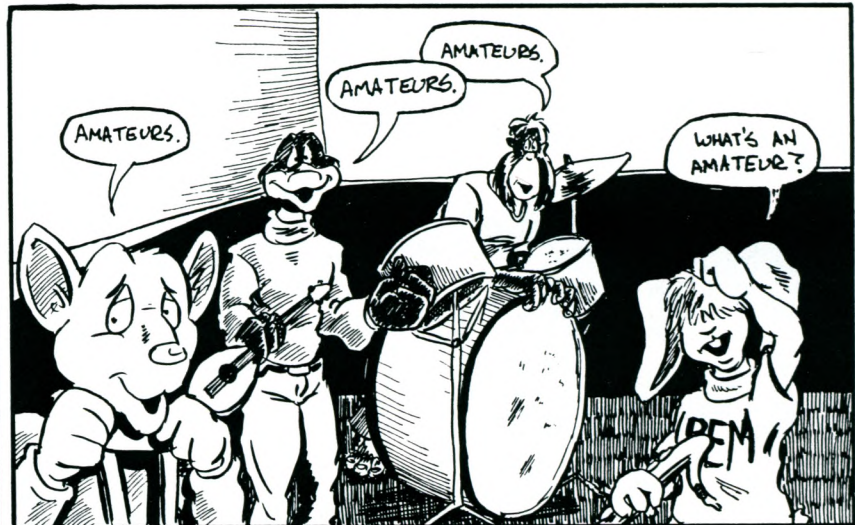
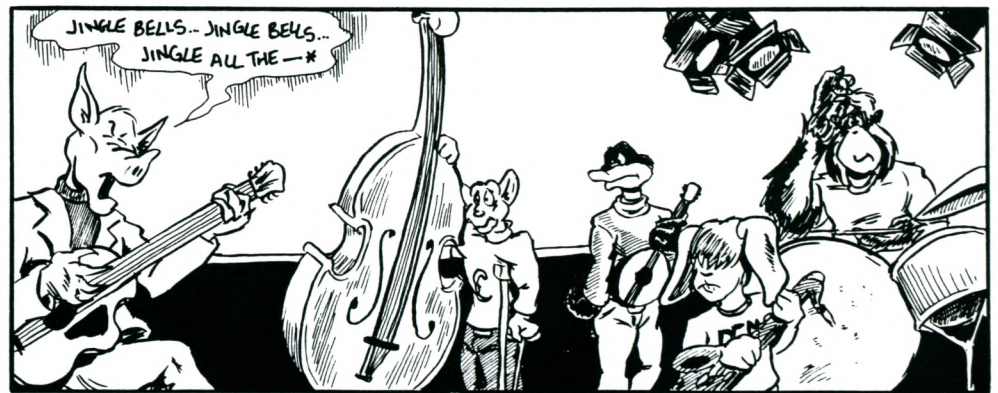
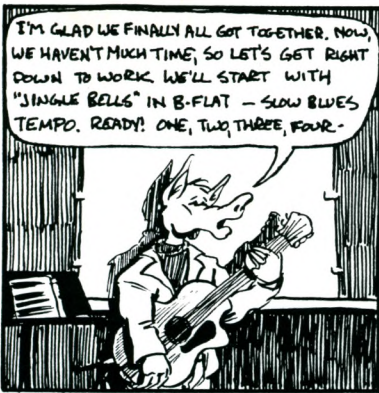
DAMMIT! JOHN LEMMING WRITES THE STUPIDEST CHORD PROGRESSIONS I'VE EVER SEEN...

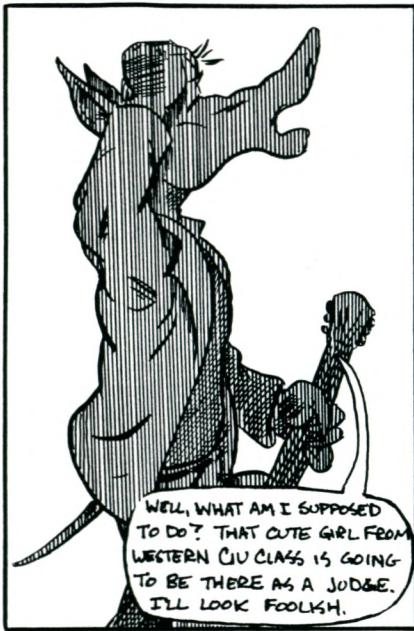


HMM...



ONCE IN ROYAL DAVID'S CITY STOOD A LONELY CATTLESHED THERE A MOTHER HELD HER BABY YOU'D DO WELL TO REMEMBER THE THINGS HE LATER SAID...





FEW DAYS LATER...



# The Boxonian

## Student Weekly

WE BE NEWS!

### Campus band wins local talent show

By Walrus Kronkite

Ridebis, et licet rideas. Ego ille quem nos-ti apros et quidem pul-cherrimos cepi. Ipse? inquis. Ipse; non tamen ut

Ilares feras. Experieris non Dianam magis mon-tibus quam Minervam in-erare. Vale.

Ad retia sedebam: erat in proximo non ven-abulum aut lancea, sed stilus et pugilares; medit-abar aliquid enotabam-que, plenas tamen ceras reperartarem.



Left to right: "Bun" Hippiity, Bill Hughes, and Godfrey of the winning campus band.





# Happy Families

A Vignette Set in the Wormholes Universe  
by Mark M. Parker  
illustrated by Dave Bryant

Characters created by Mark Parker, Ken Pick, and Dave Bryant  
Universe created by Dave Bryant and Ken Pick

1215 PM PST, 21 February 2005  
Student Union Cafeteria  
California State University, Fullerton

"Meow."

Alan Daniels stood over his fiancée in the campus cafeteria, tray in hand, and greeted her in his usual manner. She, in turn, looked up from her chef's salad, tilting her head back until their eyes met, and replied, "RrrRRRRRAAAAA OOOWWWwww...." in very much the tone that a female cougar in heat might use. This was not in the least out of character for her, since she resembled one about as much as she looked like a college coed.

The unimaginative or the uninitiated might be startled to see a buxom, five-foot-five mountain lion nibbling with evident relish at a salad, but to most of Cal State Fullerton's student body, the novelty had worn off over the past two years in the academic grind. She was just another student, her feline attributes of concern only if one were allergic to cat fur.

Trona Concolor began rubbing her head against Alan's hip, nearly upsetting his tray. "Easy, dear," he admonished, deftly lifting the tray of of harm's way.

"If you spill anything on me, I'll let you lick it off," she purred.

"Oh, sure. I'd look even sillier passing hairballs than you would, m'love. Try explaining *that* to Kevin!"

Trona's whiskers whipped forward with mild annoyance. "You don't have to explain *diddly* to him. I told you, he's just jealous. God knows, I can tell when a man's hiding a fur fetish." Her eyes crossed as she noticed a shred of lettuce on one vibrissa. She flicked it off, then motioned for him to sit. "Besides, hon, a little Crisco oil controls hairballs nicely," she added with a wicked grin.

"Ecch!" was Alan's response. For emphasis, he stuck his tongue out until it reached his chin. "Are we going to go

through that again?"

"You didn't seem to mind last time...." Trona drawled slyly, as she speared a carrot stick.

The tall young man sighed and shook his head, his longish brown hair waving. "Why me? My parents were the ones with a taste for furry people."

His blonde companion giggled and reached around him to give him a squeeze. "Awwwww, poor baby." He grinned and leaned over, kissing her on the nosepad.

They bantered on, talking about the things young lovers in college talk about, oblivious to the world, and certainly unaware of the lanky stranger observing them from across the bustling, clattering dining room. He looked for all the world like a poor dirt farmer of the Great Depression Old South. And he knew Trona; ever since word of the Double Helixers had broken to the public, he'd been involved, directly and indirectly, in the tangled tragicomedy of their existence, helping to piece shattered lives together.

The process of turning those children from frightened and abused orphans into competent, self-reliant young adults was slow and often painful. Many suffered from trauma, whether from injury, abuse, a flawed computer education process, or the harrowing experience of being taken into custody and uprooted from the only home they'd known.

• • •

Some, though, had been strengthened instead. Trona, for instance, had been exemplary student at the I.R.C., winning a journalism scholarship at California State University, Fullerton. She appeared to be a promising prospect there as well.

But teenagers are impressionable and inexperienced, Helixers more than most. At the college, it didn't take long for the attention-loving semihuman girl to fall in with a crowd of affluent, spoiled "yuppie puppies". She spent so much time with them that her grades suffered. Alan, a volunteer stu-

dent tutor, had selected her case-card, and soon thereafter fell in love with her. When the inevitable crash caught up with her, she tried a sleeping-pill suicide, which Alan interrupted. He talked her back from the edge of despair and, a few weeks later, proposed.

• • •

The wiry, shaggy-haired stranger studied the couple, especially the tall, thin, dark-haired young man, seeking certain telltales.

The boy was moderately attractive — but nothing to write home about. He moved with a certain grace, but he'd also nearly dropped the tray a few minutes earlier. His grades seemed to be decent but not outstanding. Instead, it was the sight of his mobile, sensitive, bespectacled face and the knowledge that he was both intelligent and a second- or third-generation science fiction fan that was of greater import. In an environment better suited to his personality, he

could be expected to thrive.

The sharp-eyed man nodded absently, having come to a decision. He started over to them from his vantage point, well to one side where Trona couldn't see him. When he stood just behind her shoulder, he said, "Trona-of-a-lonely-heart."

She turned quickly, startled to hear a nickname she hadn't heard since she left the Institute. Where she caught sight of the familiar worn leather jacket and the man who wore it, she cried, "Jeb! What are *you* doing here?"

The sandy-haired man grinned and shoved his hands in the jacket's pockets. "Proposing answers to questions not yet asked." He winked.

"Uh, Jeb, this is Alan Daniels, my fiancé." She turned back to Alan, whose expression indicated surprised interest. "Honey, this is Jeb Johnson. You've heard of him."

The younger man recovered and nodded. "Yep. Author, pop psychologist, and late of the Institute for the Rehabilitation of Constructs. Do I win a prize?...Y'know, that last book of yours really torqued a lot of people."

Jeb chuckled evilly. "I specialize in that — I've been practicing for years."

Alan pushed his oversize glasses back up his nose and smiled back. "M'dad told me once that you remind him of a Robert Heinlein character."

"Really. Hmm. Well, tell him I'm flattered."

"I'll do that. Say, I just thought....What are you doing out in public? The last I heard, you got so much publicity for helping Billy Bryson out of prison, you couldn't go anywhere without being mobbed."

"Clean living. Actually, though, if you know how to avoid the rush, and show up when everybody else is busy elsewhere, you can do pretty well." Jeb had continued his



observation of Alan during their conversation, and now commented, "Trona dear, he looks more like a cat than you do."

"So people say," Alan returned, "and if you say that you want to see what the kids'll look like, you'll die a slow and painful death."

"I wouldn't think of saying such a tactless thing," Jeb said innocently. He stuck out his hand, having decided that Alan passed his informal examination. "Pleased to meet you at last, sir."

"Likewise." Alan shook the proffered hand cautiously.

"Well now," the older man continued briskly, "Have you two set the big date?"

Trona beamed. "This June — around the tenth."

"Good. You'll beat Jan and Billy by months...maybe a year or more." As he spoke, Jeb seated himself next to Trona. Her tray of food reminded him that he hadn't eaten since breakfast. "They're so busy with an exploding career, they may never make it legal."

"Yeah, well, I imagine that being the biggest thing in rock music in years keeps ya busy," Alan mused, sipping his milk. "Any wedding they have'll create a hell of a media circus."

Jeb nodded, eyeing Trona's salad longingly. "That it would. I told them just to tie the knot real fast in Vegas so the press wouldn't pester 'em. Remember when Stephen Temlin and Arlene Sands got married in Miami and those two press choppers had a midair? I guess no celebrity wedding's complete without a turkey roast."

"Oh ick," groaned Trona. "Jeb, do you mind? Some of us are trying to eat."

"Don't remind me. Anyway, I humbly suggest that you two do something similar. You'll almost certainly be the first human-Helixer marriage, so you may have the same problems with reporters storming the church."

It was Alan's turn to nod. "Yeah. Thanks for the concern. We thought of that, so it'll be invitation only. An old friend of mine'll shoot a pro-quality videotape of the whole thing, and we'll throw a copy out the door for the cream of world journalism to fight tooth and claw over. You know, I think footage of *that* would be more entertaining than the wedding."

"Darling, I may be one of those predators one of these days," Trona reminded him a trifle sharply. She stretched out an arm and spread the fingers on that hand; the gloss on the thick, heavy fingernails caught the light. "At least I'll be

a real predator."

"My, isn't she the catty one," Jeb quipped. "But if we wanted one on their level, we'd have to get Amber."

All three chuckled, reminded of the spunky striped-skunk Helixer girl, the only one of her kind.

"Speaking of the other, how's everybody doing at Helixer High?" Trona asked around a forkful of salad, a flash of her omnivore teeth showing how human the Helixers actually were.

Jeb was briefly reminded of the first time he saw George, Special Creation's wolf rhythm guitarist, blow a raspberry at Angelo, the fox bass player. It was a startling sight more suited to a Warner Brothers cartoon.

"Uh, just fine. No suicide attempts in months." Unable to stand it any longer, Jeb reached over and snagged a celery stalk, proceeding to nibble on it enthusiastically. "I think we've got them all propped up now emotionally." The trick, he said, was to get their personalities to settle and grow. His methods had antagonized some of the other I.R.C. staffers, but he managed to get consistent results even in difficult cases.

"Psychology's still as much voodoo as science — the placebo effect wouldn't work otherwise, and you can harness that to cure just about anything. They didn't like my methods because a lot of time and effort in treating the emotionally or mentally ill goes into keeping the sensibilities of the well from being offended, and I never bothered with that. Oh well, you can't make an omelet without breaking eggs." All the time he spoke, Jeb had something to munch on, a slice of carrot, a leaf of lettuce, or another piece of celery.

Alan raised an eyebrow to see Jeb helping himself to Trona's salad. Trona stifled a laugh, knowing that Jeb was partly playing a joke on her lover and that he, in turn, was too polite to comment on Jeb's piracy.

"Of course, we're still graduating the best and the brightest," Jeb continued. "Any time now, though, we'll be getting into the real problem kids. Fortunately, as we get more and more of them able to stand on their own two feet, we're able to devote more time to the ones who need it."

He sighed and briefly looked very tired. "It's a slow process, though, and with far too many of them, a firm hand is all that's holding them together." A wistful smile displaced the weariness. "What really gets me is how some of them actually call me 'Dad'. That really burns the critics — they don't see that there's a difference between becoming too involved with a patient and getting close enough to a Helixer kid to let 'im see what a human being's really like. Hell, sometimes I think I'm about the only one who sees you kids as just a bunch of teenagers stuffed into animal

suits....Maybe all they can see are the hopeless ones.

"How bad off are they?" asked Alan clinically. "I'd've thought the company'd destroy the really defective ones." Oblivious to Trona's uneasiness at this subject, he took a hearty bite of his sandwich.

"They did. The success rate was only about, umm, two out of three, I'd guess. But you don't have to be able to read or write to bounce around in bed. They just had a minimum standard of competence that they used as a yardstick, and if the kid passed, she got shipped." He shook a stick of broccoli at Alan for emphasis, then dipped it in the remnants of the salad dressing. "The owners had too much invested in them to complain much, so unless your Helixer was practicing to be Norman Bates, there wasn't a lot you could do. I mean, can you see complaining to your local Better Business Bureau? Double Helix made them cute and compliant and that was about it."

"And society's stuck with the results," Trona concluded.

"Why'd you think I insisted you kids take care of each other? People are stupid, Trona. They won't of their own free will see that helping other people helps themselves. You kids who make it on your own will be judged against the ones who can't, and nobody'll think about the fact that the successful ones are victims just as much as the others.

A few people had taken notice of the the celebrity in their midst and had drifted over to listen to the odd conversation. One or two were even taking notes.

Jeb continued, commenting that the jobs Helixers were likeliest to get would put them in the public eye. In any kind of industrial or food-service job, they would get fur in their work or work in their fur. So unless they intended to go back to what they did before (and a few no doubt did), the Helixers would have to be better at the jobs they could do than humans, but not so much so as to create jealous resentment — a delicate balance. Jeb tried to foster a strong sense of "family" to help the kids in their uphill battle.

"And that, at long last, brings me to why I'm here: My unasked question. First off, when do you two have to be at classes?"

Trona blinked as if to clear her mind, then glanced at her watch. "Uhh, an hour, I think."

Alan rolled his eyes. "Hmm, I have at least that long before I have to be anywhere, I suppose."

"Good. There are some people waiting over at Langsdorf Hall who are very interested in meeting you. They're part of the answer." Jeb stood.

"Excuse me, Jeb," Alan broke in, still sitting. "I apologize for

seeming rude or impatient, but *what in God's name is the question?*"

"Well, you could say that one answer is 'sugar and spice and animals nice'. The question, then, is obviously 'what are little Helixers made of?'"

Alan's exasperated expression made it clear that he wasn't going to put up with much more nonsense.

"All right, all right. It all began when I started to help Susan, the Institute's director, to get Billy Bryson freed. We figured that if Janet'd had parents, we could spring him on the grounds that the two of them could get married, and that the state was interfering with it. We ended up by telling them that she was an emancipated minor at the time of the allegedly unlawful intercourse, but the thought about parents still intrigued me."

"Why?" Trona asked as she hastily swallowed the last of her salad. "The closest we ever had to a parent was the woman who donated the egg, and all her genes were taken out when ours were put in."

Jeb gestured with a hand. "True enough, but let me finish. That was about the time Janet was trying to form Special Creation, and they were rehearsing in that old ammo bunker. The first time I was over there, I made a stupid comment about the owners and creators getting what they deserved."

• • •

One of the keyboardists, Margie Krauslin, took offense. Her owner had been a sweet old widow who'd been fond of cats. Her favorite, a white angora named Marojam, had gotten out of the house and was promptly run down by a car. A Double Helix salesman happened by shortly after she discovered the cat dying by the front gate.

Being a marginally good-hearted type, he offered her a ride to the vet, but the cat expired on the way. She was very upset, and he saw a golden sales opportunity. After all, the woman was getting on in years and had nobody to take care of her.

• • •

"Now," Jeb went on, clearing his throat, "I won't speculate as to the extent of the guy's involvement in the cat's demise. But in any case, a deal was struck. The cat was put in a cooler along with a blood sample of the woman's, and the whole mess was Learjetted to Laysan Island. Thus was begat a Jellicle cat, and a damn fine pianist besides. She and the old woman loved each other, and the poor girl took it pretty hard when her 'mother' died of a heart attack in custody."

So Margie had had good reason to be indignant over Jeb's comment. But Janet quieted her by stating that she'd seen a white angora girl called Margret being dragged off to the ovens by *her* owners, and that she'd looked an awful lot like Margie. Jan later confided to Jeb that she'd made the whole story up to get him off the hook.

"But it did get me to thinking," he finished, waving a hand.

Alan looked up from his dessert. "You're saying that some of them are related."

"Yep. We know for a fact that some of them are, like the *Vulpecula* triplets. Now they were sold separately, but some weren't. And if you must know, my dear Trona, Vixie and I are getting along fine. Kitsu's a hostess at the flagship Benihana restaurant in L.A., and Reynardine's getting involved in Sunpyre Promotions. Alan, that's the company we formed to handle Helixer talent. Oh yes, that reminds me. Trona, Rey told me to tell you that Lincoln-Mercury is looking for a spokesperson, if you're interested."

Jeb thought about helping himself to Trona's soft drink but decided against it. "The Double Helix techies wouldn't talk, so we have to guess at a lot of things. And I wasn't satisfied with the few answers we did have.

"Something else. Everybody knows how attractive Helixers are. They were made to be, after all. But how did the company manage to produce *consistently* good-looking results?"

Jeb was pleased to note looks of disturbed puzzlement not only on the young couple's faces, but on several of the hovering crowd's as well. He thoroughly enjoyed getting people to think.

"Let's back up a bit. When the Helixers were checked into the I.R.C., they were gene-typed. Remember that, Trona? It's become pretty routine these days as a form of identification and a way of finding the potential for genetic disease. So I compared Margie's genograph to the old woman's. Sure enough, they matched closely except for the areas you'd expect. You know, face, tail, fur, and so forth. Then I looked for other matches. There weren't any, so Margie's an only child. Partially."

"Hmmm?" Trona inquired. "Partially?"

"There were about a dozen matches with other angora cat girls, so she's got sisters on the feline side. I rigged a program to search for matches in the Helixer genetic catalog the Institute had built up. I found out some interesting things."

Alan dusted his hands and picked up his now-empty tray. "Let's head over to meet these people, and you can finish this story up on the way. I take it that these are relatives of Trona's, sort of."

"That's right." Jeb stood and looked around at the crowd that had gathered and, indicating the students who'd taken notes, he cracked, "There'll be a quiz in the morning." In the ripple of laughter that followed, he added, "Seriously, you'll all see the rest of this story in the school paper tomorrow, and there'll be a press conference for the regular papers." He headed off to snatch a slice of crumb cake and an orange juice, pausing only to autograph the cashier's copy of one of his books before rejoining his companions outside the student union.

Juggling his makeshift lunch, he succeeded in zipping up his jacket against the cold February wind. A storm front had passed through the previous night, leaving in its wake large puddles and a gray sky. Alan's faded Levi's jacket seemed just adequate, but Trona appeared a bit warm in her blouse, jeans, and ankle boots. Or maybe that was just from being in the slightly too warm cafeteria. Jeb recalled how often he'd heard one of the kids say that fur was fun, but being able to take it off sometimes would be more fun.

"Now, where was I? Ah yes....There were quite a few matches on the animal side. I call that the 'base' side. It seems the company used the same pattern for a lot of you kids. For instance, all the female red foxes are base-sisters — they used the same animal for all of them."

"Really?" Alan inquired interestedly. "How about the males?"

Jeb explained that the company apparently hadn't wanted to take any chances with sex-linked characteristics, so they used male foxes. There didn't seem to be many brother-sister relationships at all in the more exotic breeds.

"They probably got most of the genetic material from zoos and suchlike, and most zoos want their animals to breed. you know enough about heredity, I'm sure, to know that you don't want siblings producing offspring."

Alan responded, "Too much chance of genetic defects."

"Right. But brothers and sisters *were* common with the more familiar animal types — except domestic cats; most of them were completely unrelated. Most people had specific cats in mind when they ordered cat-Helixers, I guess."

"That's very interesting, but what about the human side?" Trona asked a trifle impatiently.

Jeb finished his bite of cake and washed it down with a swig of juice before answering. "That, dear girl, is the most fascinating part of all."

He had only found something over three hundred human genographs in his search of the Helixer database. Of some, there were only a few examples, such as Margie Krauslin and the rather bountifully endowed Amber.

"Id've thought her genotype would have been more popular, but apparently she must've been, ah, enhanced on the gene machine, because the only vague matches I could find were all slender. So I don't really know."

Trona broke in. "What about Lutrina?"

Jeb looked a bit taken aback at the unexpected question. "The otter? Thirteen half-sisters. You know her?"

Trona grinned. "Sure. We were in practical math together. She never did very well. I don't think she took it very seriously."

"That poor girl can't take anything very seriously. A lot of you kids have just a trace of the original animal's personality, and sometimes the designers reinforced it by choosing a similar human template and programming. Otters are mostly playfulness and curiosity, not deep thinkers. But she's a trouper, and tries hard. We had to practically lead her by the nose to get her to graduate, but she should be ready by this summer. We had to get her a submersible nagger good for a thousand feet down. With that, she should do all right. I've got a job lined up for her at Raging Waters as a lifeguard, if all goes well. She's also interested in oceanography and mariculture. At least she's done well in those courses."

"Nagger?" Alan looked puzzled, not having heard the term before.

"Dear, that's those little pocket keyboards like the one I've got at home. Do you remember the trouble I used to have with my sense of time? Well, the nagger helps remind me of things, and my sense of time's a lot better now, too." Trona's tail twitched with pleasure over this achievement.

"Most Helixers' time-sense is pretty poor, at first," Jeb noted. "Like Amerindians. Cougars and Navajos don't have to worry about being somewhere on time, like bankers do. And as sex toys, all Helixers had to do was look cute, keep clean, and come when called. Time just wasn't very important to them."

Alan looked away. "I try not to think about that part of it." Trona leaned against him, and said with a slight edge to her voice, "You and me both, Alan." She briefly buried her face in his chest. They walked on in silence for a moment, surrounded by hurrying students and faculty in the quad formed by the library and the performing arts, sciences, and humanities buildings.

Jeb finally resumed briskly, "As for you, my dear, you have about thirty sisters, which means you'll not want for bridesmaids."

Trona stopped abruptly, nearly causing Alan to stumble. "Thirty? Christ!"

"No, He's not one of your relatives — at least not a close one. But six of them are cougars." Jeb was enjoying her reaction immensely.

Alan remarked, deadpan, "Just think, love, now you're part of a litter. And just yesterday you were an only semihuman."

Trona's ears went back. "Very funny."

"Hey now, I'm serious. I never had any brothers or sisters. I think it's wonderful."

Trona burst out laughing at a sudden thought. "D'you realize how expensive Christmas is going to be? We'll have to save up all year."

"Yeah," her fiancé returned, "but we'll clean up at the wedding."

"Well, I don't think you'll have to worry about Christmas that much. What I'd like to know is, why so many cougars? I thought most rich men would rather shoot 'em than sleep with 'em." Jeb looked uncharacteristically puzzled as they rounded the science building and came within sight of Langsdorf Hall, the campus administration building.

"I'm surprised at you, Jeb," Trona chided him. "You could say the same thing about any of the wild-animal Helixers. Cougars are usually pretty mellow as big cats go. You remember the troubles you had with a lot of the others. The only easygoing ones I can think of are Freddy the tiger and Leonelle, and she could be a bitch sometimes. But I'm small, easy to get along with, I'm obviously not a domestic cat, and I purr. Of course, personally, I'd like to go after some Owners with a hunting rifle."

"And you seemed like such a *nice* girl....But back to my story." Jeb started on again. "There was one more piece to the puzzle."

In the homes of many owners were pictures of Helixers, printed by a high-quality graphics printer like those hooked to the mainframe found in the Laysan facility. "Obviously they were printed to give the customer some idea of what his Helixer would look like, because they were dated before the delivery receipts. But where did they get the info to make them?"

"I figured they used an image averaging program on a photo of the animal and one of a human. So I ran a bunch of 'em through a subtracter program to separate the human features from the animal faces. The pictures I got back were pretty fuzzy, but they reminded me of college yearbook photos. I grabbed a yearbook a friend had of the year Double Helix first started and digitized the pics in it. The computer came back with twenty eighty-percent matches — pretty good considering the material I had to work with."

"Alan, Trona...you've seen the Red Cross Organmobiles on campus, haven't you?"

The young couple's expressions settled into shock as they thought it through while climbing the stairs leading to the building's rear main entrance. Alan recalled the organ donor card he'd filled out and the tissue sample that had been taken. In the event he died accidentally, the Red Cross volunteer had told him, they would be able to match his genograph to an organ transplant recipient....

"S-some of the Red Cross volunteers were from Double Helix?" Trona's voice was as thick as the butterflies in her stomach.

"Quite a few. I checked when I looked through the organ bank records." Jeb paused to open the door and made an 'after you' gesture. "Any time they ran across a particularly good-looking student, they'd divert a little drop of blood to Laysan Island. Every one of you has a human half-brother or -sister. And yours is waiting inside with her family."

They reached the conference room moments later. Trona was visibly excited, tail and whiskers twitching. Almost every Helixer wished at one time or another for a family. All they had was the overworked I.R.C. staff and each other. To suddenly find out that she actually had one — sort of — was more than a little overwhelming. and to hear that they wanted to meet her....That's what Jeb had said, and he didn't kid about this sort of thing.

Jeb touched her shoulder. "Easy does it, girl. You should know a few things first before you go running in there. First off, your 'father' is a doctor and very understanding, and so was his family, but this is still a big shock for them. After all, they've just found out they have thirty-five kids instead of four. Give it some time for everyone to come to terms with it, and don't expect a joyous and emotional reunion in there.

"I wanted you to be the first Helixer to meet your 'parents' because you'll be taking the long walk down the aisle soon, and I figured you'd want someone on your side of the chapel besides funny animals and I.R.C. staff."

His eyes sparkled as he suppressed a laugh. "Oh yes, and about that chapel. Your 'family' is part of a very old people. A people, I might add, to whom this sort of crazy thing happens constantly. Your big nose doesn't just come from your cougar ancestry." With that, he opened the door with a flourish.

A flash bulb popped, and when the dazzle cleared, there were Vixie, a pair of counselors from I.R.C. and Cal State, a reporter and photographer, and a family: husband, wife, and two grown children roughly Alan's and Trona's age, and they indeed had a distinct ethnic look to them.

"Trona! How are ya?" Vixie bounced up from her seat on a couch and over to the other semihuman. "I'd like you to meet Rachel Feldstein, your half-sister, and her brother Joshua and their parents Sheldon and Anna."

There was a moment of tense silence, broken by Anna. "All my life I've asked God for another daughter, and He gives me one who is a *l'veeyah*."

Joshua chuckled. "Yes, mama, but now you'll have thirty-five weddings to cry at, so it can't be all bad."

"Did I say it was bad? If my new daughter is a lion, at least she is a beautiful one."

Jeb, having faded back to watch, grinned delightedly as the chatter went on, and silently thanked their common God. He leaned down to Vixie, who'd nestled up to him, and whispered in her alert, pointed ear, "Now, little one, you see what a *mitzvah* is. And by the way, your 'parents' are Hare Krishnas."

She looked up, laughing quietly, and slugged his shoulder in affectionate exasperation.

end.



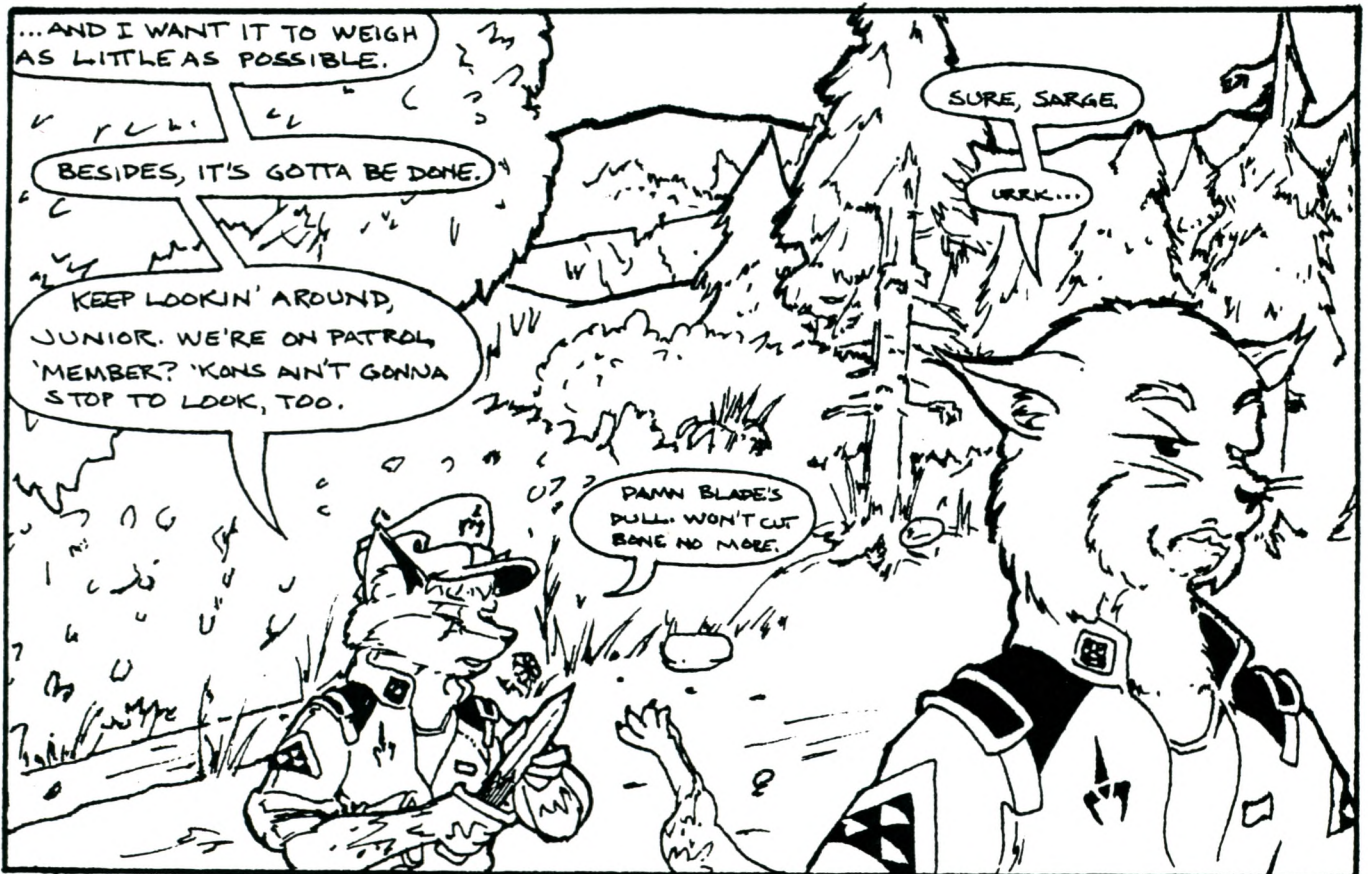
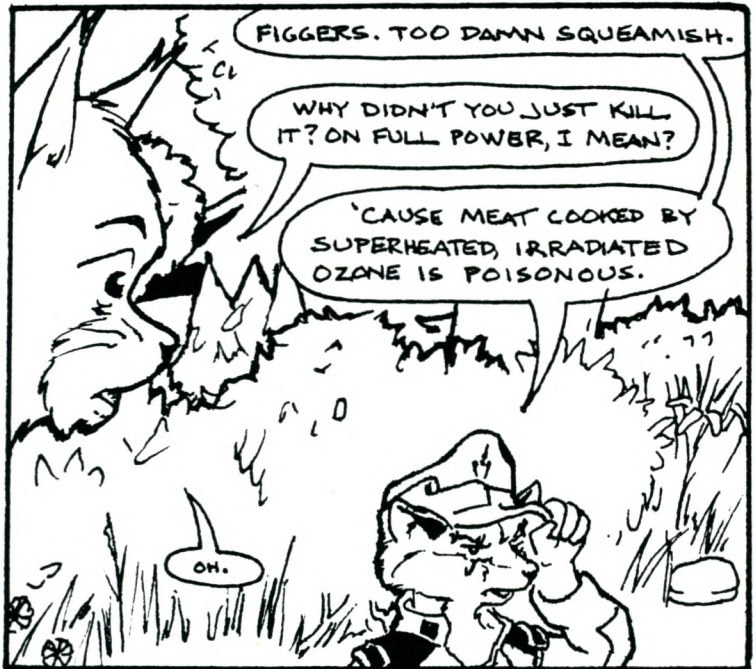
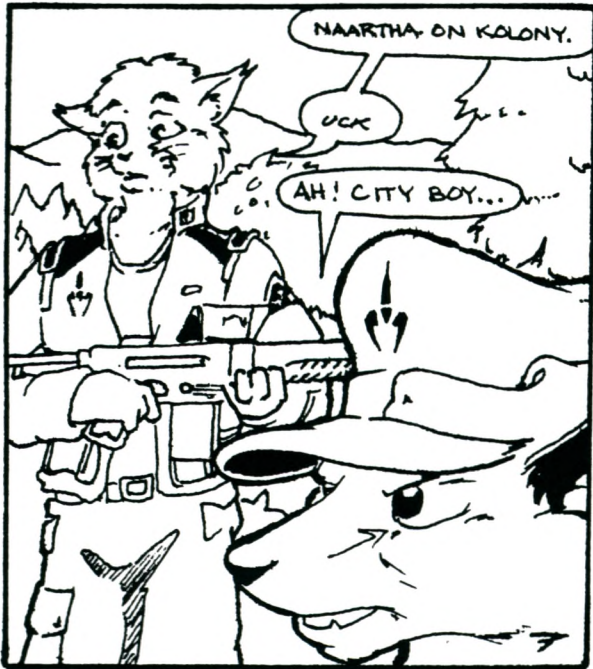


# EMPIRES

STORY, LAYOUT : CHRIS GRANT • INKS : ERIC BLUMRICH • LETTERING : LANCE RUND











YOU DON'T KNOW HOW OLD YOU ARE?

LIKE I SAID... NOT IMPORTANT TO ME. I'M IN MY THIRTIES, SOMEWHERE.



DO YOU KNOW WHERE YOU'RE FROM?

NEVER HEARD OF IT.

SYNDRA.



BE SURPRISED IF YOU HAD. FRONTIER WORLD, RAUMSFELDT SECTOR. DOESN'T EVEN HAVE ANY REAL TOWNS YET.



...YOU'RE GONNA HELP ME WITH THIS NOW.



OR, AT LEAST, NOT WHEN I LEFT. THEY MIGHT, BY NOW.

C'MON, JUNIOR...

IN A FEW MINUTES THEIR PRIZE IS SECURED...

WE'LL TAKE A COUPLE MINUTES  
'FORE HEADIN' BACK...

SO... WHY'D  
YOU JOIN THE  
ARMY, SAR'ENT?



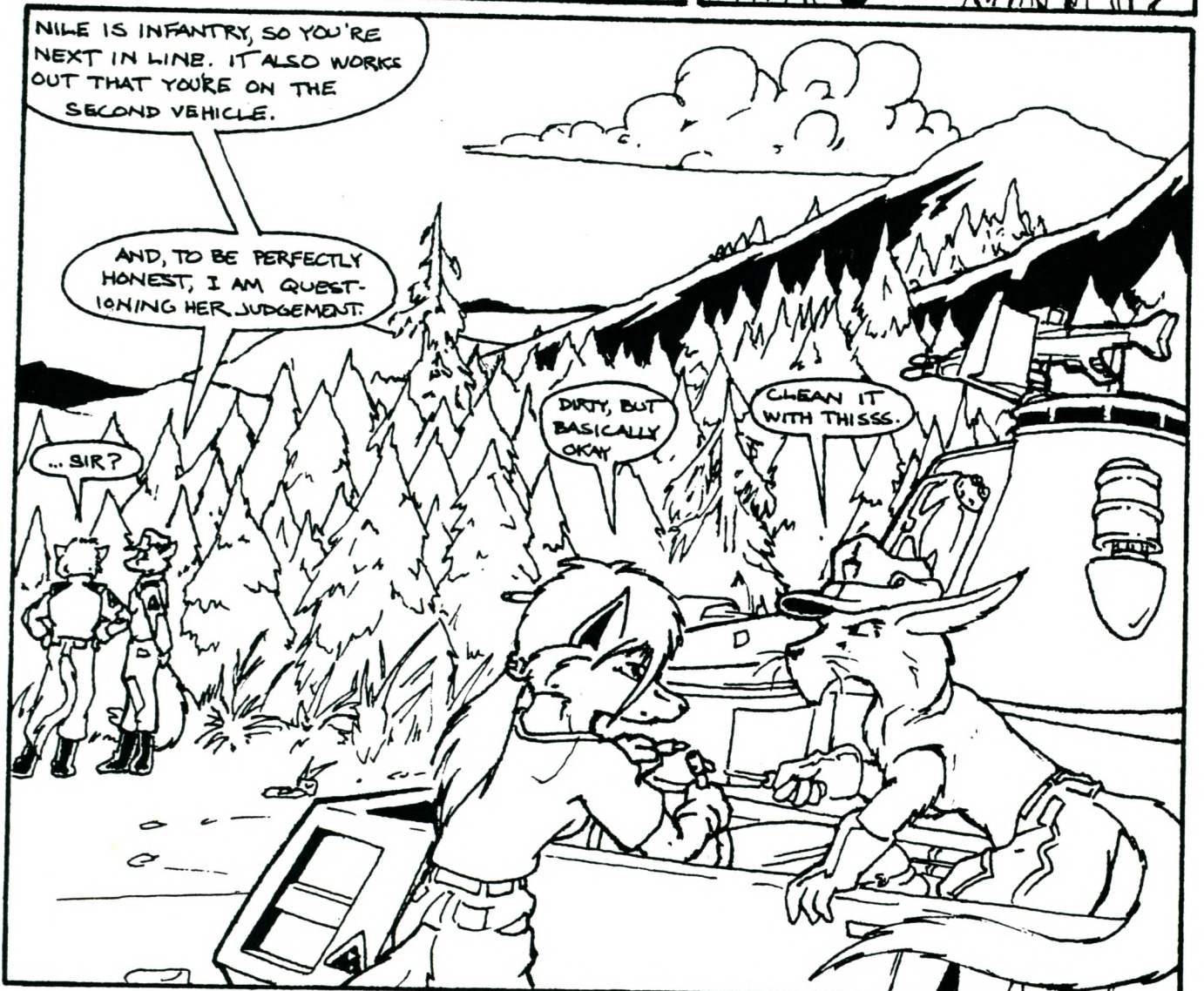
LET'S  
GET  
MOVING.

BACK AT THE TEMPORARY CAMP, KHASHIN AND BARONA WORK TOGETHER ON THE EIGHTBALL WHILE THE LEADERS DISCUSS LONG-RANGE PLANS

... FURTHER UP INTO THE TREES WE GO  
WE'LL NEED TO BLEND WITH THE TER-  
RITORY BETTER.

I EXPECTED THAT. I SENT  
TURYA OUT TO GATHER SOME FOLIAGE  
TO PUT ON THE VEHICLES. I WAS GOING  
TO ASK NILE TO HELP, BUT, AHH...





HER SQUAD WAS WIPED OUT IN THE INITIAL ATTACK. AT FIRST I THOUGHT SHE WAS JUST UPSET. BUT IT'S MORE THAN THAT. SHE'S HARBORING A GRUDGE AGAINST ALL FELISH.



SPECIESM?



'FRAID SO. SHE'S NOT LETTING GO. AND RIGHT NOW WE NEED EVERYONE STABLE.



MORALE'S GOING TO BE IMPORTANT. WE DON'T KNOW HOW LONG WE'RE GOING TO HAVE TO REMAIN IN HIDING. WE'VE GOT TO KEEP THEM BUSY AND LET THEM PLAY AROUND.

THEY'RE HANDLING IT WELL, EXCEPT FOR NILE. SO FAR, SHE'S CONTENT TO SIT AND STEW.



POTENTIAL POWDERKEG.

YOU GOT IT. WE'VE GOT TO KEEP AN EYE ON HER. TRY TO ASSIMILATE HER INTO THE REST OF THE CREW, BUT STILL MAINTAIN CAUTION. WE NEED EVERYONE TOGETHER.





OH. WE GET TO BE MOM AND DAD FOR A BUNCH OF KIDS...



YOU'RE CLOSER TO THE TRUTH THAN YOU KNOW, SIERRA...

"BABES IN THE WOODS", EH?



HEY, KHASHIN... CHECK 'EM OUT!



WHADDAYA THINK? TWENTY LESATS SAYS THEY'RE IN EACH OTHER'S ARMS IN TWO WEEKS



TWO WEEKS? I SAY, A MONTH

PEPSEMIST!

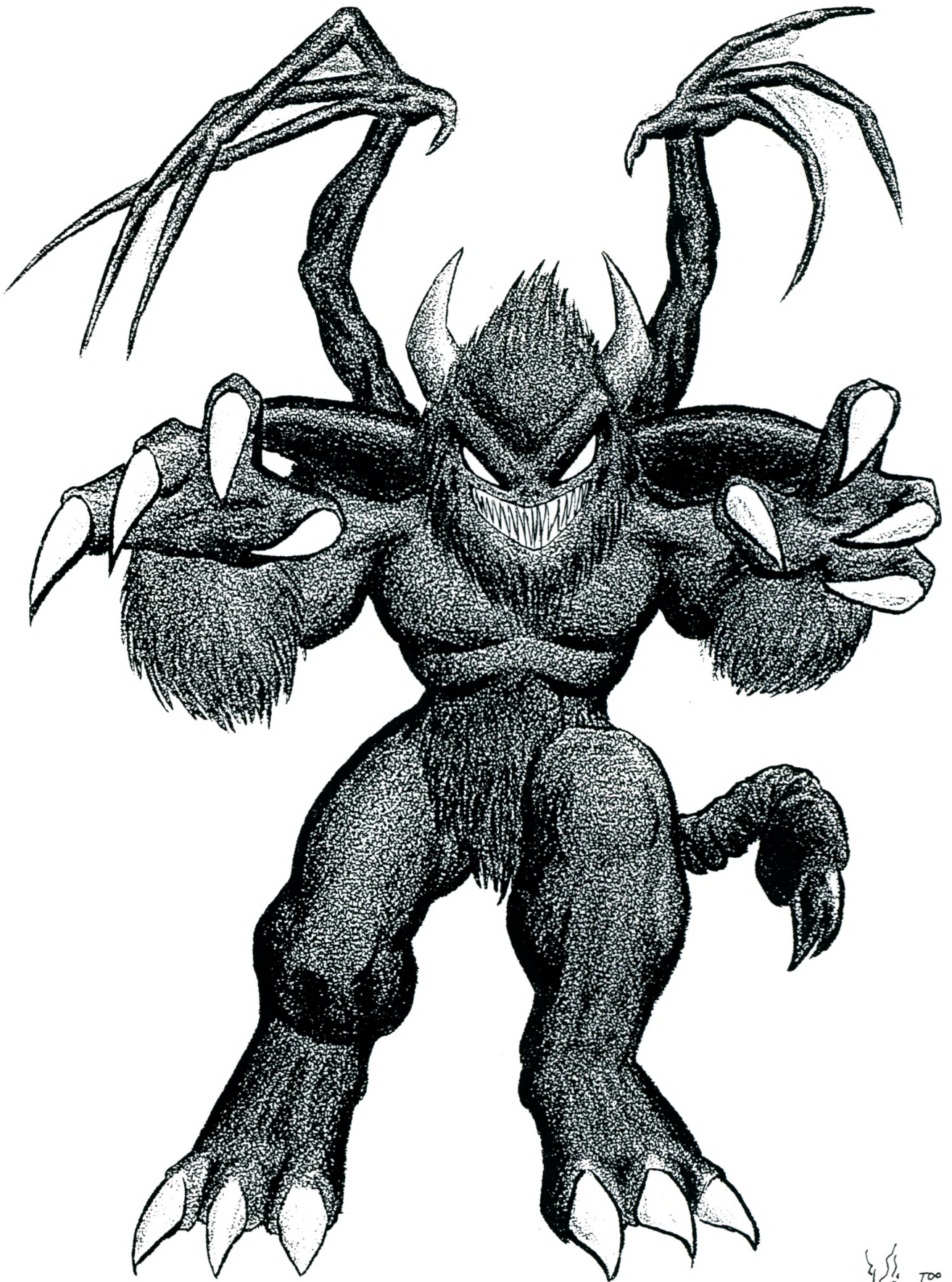
DAMN RIGHT.



WE GOT A BET?

YOU'RE ON!

CONTINUED.



TOO  
DAMMED  
HOT.  
P  
..

# DOPPLEGANGER

by Mark Stanley  
illustrated by Eric Blumrich

Alex Hartford scanned the computer screen in front of him. Nikolta said they could ship him the FX-9900 camera at \$200 a unit, as long as he bought 10,000 or more. The holiday season was coming up, he felt sure that the "Cat's Camera" chain could move that many units. The grey fox punched in the commands to purchase the cameras. Leaning back in his chair, he smiled at the holograph of his wife and child. Gina's birthday was coming up next week. He had made reservations at "Tivoli Gardens", a favorite spot of hers while they had been courting.

"Have to arrange for a babysitter." he thought to himself. But work came first. Tapping on the keyboard, he pulled down the screen for accessories to go with the newly purchased cameras.

The office door burst open on the first kick. Alex looked up to see a very large cat holding an even larger gun coming through the ruined door frame. Behind were several more figures, all armed.

"FREEZE! You even twitch a whisker, and you're dead!"

Alex froze. The patch on the cat's flak vest read "P.L.E." The Alarian law enforcement agency. What did they want with him?

"Okay, McTaggart. Put your hands above your head, nice and slow."

Alex raised his hands. "I think there's been a mistake. My name is Alex. Alex Hartford."

"There's no mistake." A second cat came into the office and patted Alex down for weapons. Finding none, he pulled the fox's wrists behind his back and cuffed them together. Grasping the fox's arm, he half walked, half dragged Alex out of the office. He could hear the officer reading him his rights, could see the puzzled looks on the faces of his fellow employees, but it all seemed like something out of a dream. Why was this happening to him? And who was the McTaggart person they thought he was? Nothing was making any sense. The officer shoved him roughly into the back of a waiting squad car and slammed the door shut.

"What is your name?"

Alex yawned and rubbed his eyes. "You've asked me that question ten times. And for the tenth time, my name is Alex Hartford."

"How old are you?"

"I'm 29 years old."

"Where have you lived for the past ten years?"

"I lived in New London up until three years ago. I moved here when my company gave me a transfer and have been living here ever since. Will you please let me call my wife. She's going to be worried about me."

"No."

"Then will you tell me why I'm being held?"

"I'm sorry. I can't do that." The lion got up from his chair and walked out of the room. Alex was left alone with the guard.

LaPurz sat down outside the interrogation room. Terra sat down next to him, a sheaf of computer flimsies in her hand.

"Is he lying?"

Terra shook her head. "He believes everything he said is true."

"How old is he?"

Terra flipped through the pages and handed one to LaPurz. "According to the heavy metal accumulation in his body, he's three and a half years old. Four years, tops."

"How about the comparison with McTaggart's DNA?"

"One hundred percent match. There's no doubt about it. He's a clone."

LaPurz sighed. "And this looked like such an easy job. What else have you found out about him, Terra?"

The grey cat pulled the flimsy with a profile of Alex's brain-wave pattern. "Look here. There's a normal brainwave

pattern, but sitting underneath it is this second pattern. No conscious activity on it, but it's there just the same. I think that Alex is just an overlay personality, with McTaggart's personality and memories lying dormant underneath it."

"What does that mean in plain language?"

"It means that Alex is a walking time bomb. There's a trigger built into him someplace. When it's tripped, Alex will cease to be, and McTaggart will exist in his place."

"Do you think he knows what he is?"

Terra shook her head again. "He hasn't a clue. As far as he knows, he's Alex Hartford, and has been for the last 29 years. That overlay personality is a real professional job. He has memories of his childhood, of his schools, everything. It's not until you really dig that you find holes in it."

LaPurz began looking at the rest of the printouts. "This is going to be a real mess. There's nothing in our legal system to handle this. He hasn't done anything wrong."

Terra looked worried. "We can't just let him go. He's potentially one of the most dangerous criminals on our planet."

"We can't hold him forever because he's potentially dangerous, Terra. We'd be holding the entire population of Alar."

"Then what do we do with him?"

"I don't know. We'll hold onto him for a while until we can reach a decision."

"Should we tell him what he is?"

LaPurz groaned as he got up. "He has the right to know. But keep an eye on him from the observation booth. He may not remain Alex Hartford after we tell him."

The story the lion was telling him was unbelievable. Alex looked again at the spread of photos lying on the desk. Any one of them could have been a picture of him. This Andrew McTaggart matched him exactly, right down to the streak of white fur that Alex had on one ear.

"You must be mistaken, Captain. I do resemble this McTaggart person very closely. But I can't be a clone. I just can't be!"

LaPurz nodded sympathetically. "I understand that this is hard for you. But facts don't lie. A clone is not hard to detect, once you know what you're looking for."

"But why now? If you knew I was a clone, why didn't you come get me before? Why did you wait?"

The lion sighed. "We only found out about you recently. One

of our agents brought in a disk from McTaggart's estate. Among the information it contained was your name and location, and that you were a clone."

Alex stood up and began to pace. "Maybe I'm an identical twin. Wouldn't that show up the same as a clone?"

"As a person lives, he accumulates certain wastes that the body cannot expel. Mercury, lead, and a variety of other metals and chemicals. The concentrations in your body are much too low for an adult. Face it, Alex. You're not more than four years old."

"But how can that be?! I can remember things that happened longer than four years ago!"

"Implanted memories. What you remember was placed in your head when you were made. They may be somebody else's memories, or they may have never happened at all. Think about it, Alex. Do you keep in touch with anyone you knew from over four years ago?"

Alex sat down and buried his face in his hands. "No. Childhood friends, kind of fell out of touch with them. My parents died years ago in a car crash." LaPurz could see the pain on Alex's face as he looked up. "The memory is so vivid! I remember the nurse in the hospital, telling me that they were dead. And now, I find...I find that I never really had any parents at all, did I?"

"In the conventional sense, no. I'm sorry."

The fox put a hand over his face, embarrassed by his emotion. "Yuh, you know, this reminds me of something a friend said. If the creators made this universe only a minute ago, and gave us the memories of everything that happened before, how would we know? He didn't count on someone being able to prove that you had only been alive four years."

"Would you like a sedative?"

"I don't know. Does this story get any worse?"

"I'm afraid it does."

"Then I'd like that sedative."

Alex listened intently to what the lion was saying. The sedative had taken most of the edge off his emotion, but what the lion was telling him still chilled him to the bone.

"Just let me make sure I'm understanding. I'm something that you call an overlay personality, and when I meet a certain condition, I'll just wink out of existence, and Andrew McTaggart will be living in my body?"

"Exactly. You can understand the position this puts us in."

"Puts you in?" Alex exclaimed. "What about the position I'm in!?" Even with the sedative, he could feel himself becoming hysterical.

"Calm," he told himself. "Just stay calm."

Putting on a more composed face, Alex began speaking. "Captain, I can handle the fact that I'm a clone. But I would very much like to go on living. This idea that I could become McTaggart at any moment scares the hell out of me! There must be something that you can do!"

"We're not to crazy about the idea, either. McTaggart is a very clever and dangerous individual. But there's nothing we can do at the moment. We're going to call some doctors tomorrow, see if they can give us any advice."

"Tomorrow may be too late! I might not exist tomorrow!"

LaPurz shook his head. "You've existed as Alex for four years. It's possible that you might revert tonight, but not very likely. The trigger must be rare, otherwise you'd be McTaggart by now. Look, get some sleep, and we'll try to sort this out in the morning."

"I want to call my wife."

The captain motioned to the guard. "Let him use the phone. Then put him in a cell for the night." LaPurz sighed. Just once, he'd like to have one of those "Open and shut" cases he'd heard so much about.

Alex waited patiently for the results of the morning of tests. The Alarian Center for Genetic Research was much bigger than any hospital he had ever been to. Across from him, his guard sat silently reading one of the flat yellow disks that were kept in almost all waiting rooms. Alex resumed reading his own screen, learning more about what rights he had, and more importantly, what rights he didn't have, as a clone. He told his wife that he was being detained by the police for a couple of days, and not to worry. She would, but he found himself unable to tell her what was going on just now.

"The doctor will see you now, Mr. Hartford."

Alex nodded to the receptionist and walked into the office. His guard followed, still silent. Alex wondered if he ever talked.

The doctor was an otter, the white of her hospital coat distracting from the rumpled state of her fur. Most otters spent a lot of time grooming, but it was obvious the doctor was more concerned with things other than her appearance. She motioned for Alex to sit.

"You are presenting us with a most interesting problem. What is wanting to be done is the making permanent of your personality, and the wiping of the McTaggart personality."

Alex shifted nervously. "That's right. Can it be done?"

"You must understand what the problems involved. Memories are not sitting in the brain at one point only. Memories spread all over, like crispy crinkles in ice cream. You no can just go in and pull out the ones you not want."

"What about fixing my personality, so I don't vanish when this second personality is activated?"

The otter spun her notebook computer around so that Alex could see the screen. "It is not so simple. Your Alex personality is designed to peel off. When activated, your McTaggart personality will rip through like bullet through wet tissue paper. Alex will cease to exist."

This wasn't what he wanted to hear. "What about RNA treatment? Like those artificial personalities that you can buy in a store? Could I be preserved, and injected after McTaggart took over?"

"No, no, no. Those personalities are toys. The brain makes it's own RNA to store memories. With an injection, you only think you are another person for little while. Then the body clear the foreign RNA, and you are yourself again."

"Hypnotism. Re-enforce my personality so the second one can't take over."

"No, the Alex personality is designed to be broken apart by the McTaggart personality. It no can be done."

"How about an implant. A chip to prevent the second personality from activating?"

"We do not know the method of the origin signal. Without knowing how the takeover is activated, we no can suppress the signal to stop it."

"Anything?"

The otter spun her computer back around and began pressing buttons on it's surface. "Not at this moment. But we will be working on it."

"What's going to happen to me, then?"

The doctor smiled at this. "We have been able to work something out on that problem. We be taking advantage of the two brain wave patterns you are having. Put chip inside your skull to monitor your brainwaves. If one of the patterns disappear, we know you have reverted. We will implant a homing unit in your shoulderblade. It will be triggered by chip in your head. If you become McTaggart, the police will be able to find and arrest him. Until then, you should be able to live fairly normal life."

"It doesn't sound like a very satisfactory solution. I could still

cease to exist at any moment."

The otter shrugged. "You rather would spend your life in a cell?"

"No. I suppose not. What time is the operation?"

"We have you scheduled in about an hour. You can wait outside."

Alex got up and began to walk out of the office. "Just a minute. If I do become McTaggart, how can the police arrest him? He wouldn't have committed any crimes yet. What would be the charge?"

The otter looked surprised at the question. "Why, murder one, of course. He would have killed Alex Hartford."

The guard dropped him off by his home. Alex's head and shoulder still hurt from the operation. The guard regarded him silently from the front seat.

"Thanks for the ride."

The guard nodded in his direction.

"Aren't you going to say anything?"

The guard shook his head no.

"Do you know how to talk?"

The guard nodded yes.

"Am I ever going to hear you say something?"

The guard grinned. "No." Alex smiled as the car lifted on it's magnetic field and fled silently down the hill. Humor had been notable only by it's absence in the last 24 hours. Slowly, he turned and walked to his home, trying to think how Gina would react to the fact of what he was.

It was much later in the evening when he had finished telling his wife what had happened to him. She was wearing her favorite lounging around sweater, and regarding him with bright eyes. Alex was unsure if she believed him or not. It was all he could do to believe it himself.

"You're only four years old?" Gina giggled. "Boy, have I been robbing the cradle!"

"It's not funny, Gina."

She cuddled up next to him. "You're so serious about all this. Hey, what's that in your ear?"

Alex leaned over so she could see it more clearly. "It's a tattoo. It was done at the research center today."

Gina read the spidery letters over the seal of Alar. "Alex Hartford. Clone of Andrew McTaggart. Non-enhanced." She drew back. "This is real?"

Alex nodded. "I didn't know myself. The police told me just yesterday what I am. I'm sorry."

"Sorry? For what?" Gina took his hands in hers. "You're still the man I fell in love with. You're just...a bit younger than I expected. We'll be able to work this out."

Alex shook his head. This part was going to be the most painful. "We won't be able to work this out." Gina felt his grip tighten on her hands.

"I can't stay here any longer. This other personality, this McTaggart, he's not a nice person, Gina." He met her eyes. "I have to leave. I can't risk letting him hurt you or the baby."

"There's no way of resisting this takeover?"

"Not yet. The doctors at the research center said they'd try."

"Marriages aren't suppose to end like this, Alex."

He held her close. "I know."

They made love that night with a quiet desperation, hoping to capture as much of the moment as they could. Alex left early the next morning. Neither one of them said goodbye, neither wanting to lend any credence to the fact that this might be forever.

The door to his office had been repaired, the computer screen still showing the accessories for the FX-9900 camera. It seemed like so long ago. Another lifetime, when things were simpler. Alex sat and began to go over the options. His fellow workers were curious about what had happened, but apparently the police captain had cleared most of it up. Mistaken identity. Alex had always pictured police as hard, unemotional. Captain LaPurz gave one the feeling that he cared about everything, everyone. A sad eyed, old lion, watching over this world. Alex picked out a few of the items he thought would sell, but his heart was no longer in his work. Too much had changed, too soon. Closing out the order, he got up and headed out of the office.

"Alex! Hey, where you going?"

He turned to see Rachel from the warehouse coming up to him. He didn't see her very much, she worked downtown. Probably mad at him for leaving an order open for two days.

The auburn cat bounced up to him. "Where you been hiding, Hotshot? I didn't see you yesterday."

"Medical center. Trying to work out a problem."

"Mike said you had been picked up by the cops." She continued to walk with Alex as he left the store. "Want to let me buy you a cup of joe? My brother's a lawyer. We could talk about it."

Why not? He wasn't really heading anywhere.

"Sure," he mumbled. Rachel grabbed his arm and headed him over to the sidewalk cafe that was next to the camera store. She ordered two cups of coffee and sat down across from him at the small table.

"You look really out of it. What happened with the cops yesterday?"

Alex stirred his coffee morosely. "I suppose the people in the office told you about it?"

"Not much. Bits and pieces, mostly. Said they came and kicked in your door, then dragged you off. How come?"

Alex sipped his coffee. Too hot. "I might as well tell you. Everyone's going to find out, sooner or later."

He looked across the table at her. "I'm a clone, Rachel. A clone of a known criminal named Andrew McTaggart."

Her eyes widened. "You weren't supposed to find that out."

"Huh?"

"Alex, how long have we known each other?"

"I'm not sure." He took another sip of his coffee. "About five years, I guess."

He stopped drinking. Five years! He had known Rachel for five years! But he had only been alive for four. Of course! How could he have been so stupid? The whole point of having a clone would be so that it was available when you needed it. McTaggart would have had to have somebody watching him. Rachel must have been working for McTaggart all this time. She was the only one who knew him when he had been transferred here. She was the one who advised him to turn down that transfer to Kittenridge. It all made sense. And she probably knew how to trigger him into becoming McTaggart. His hands shook as he put the cup down. Rachel smiled at him from across the table.

"Now do you understand?" she asked.

Alex reacted without thinking. He threw the coffee at her and bolted. She hissed, withdrawing from the hot liquid. By the time she had recovered, Alex had already made it half way across the parking lot, headed for the mall across the street. Rachel ran after him, but lost more time as Alex darted directly across the street, neither waiting or caring if there was traffic. Rachel waited for a clear spot, then ran across just

in time to see Alex enter the mall. She followed, not noticing the grey cat who, in turn, was pursuing her.

It was too early in the morning for the mall to have any large crowds. Alex headed down the corridor at a dead run, hoping to get out of the line of sight before Rachel got in the door. Ducking around the corner, he slowed to a walk. It would be less conspicuous. All shops he looked in were boxes, no rear exits. Maybe they just weren't obvious. All stores were suppose to have a second route in case of fire. He checked behind him, and looked straight into the eyes of Rachel as she turned the corner.

"Andrew! Stop!" The name was directed at him. His feet skidded on the tile floor as he sprinted down the corridor. He heard Rachel shout something else at him, but it was drowned out by the distance. Another corner and he came to the escalator. The support fields of the vertical tubes would gently raise or lower people to the level desired. Running to the up tube, he stopped. The tube was closed, an "Out of Order" sign pasted across it's entrance.

"Andrew!" Rachel was getting closer. This next move wasn't going to win him any friends. Alex jumped into the down side and began climbing up the people in the tube.

The fat lady swore at the fox as he climbed up her leg and jumped off on the second floor. People were so rude these days. Nobody had respect for a real lady any more. She was just working herself up to full righteous anger when an auburn cat landed on her and jumped up to grasp the leg of the man above her. Ms. Frumple was a normally gentle soul, but enough is enough. Resolving to do it in a very ladylike fashion, Ms. Frumple turned and sank her teeth into Rachel's leg.

Alex had started to run down the corridor when something caught in the corner of his vision. "New You. RNA personalities" Looking back, he could see Rachel making her way up the escalator, despite the efforts of a fat lady trying to bite her. Not much time. He ran up to the counter.

"I need a personality!"

"So do a lot of people." The clerk smiled at his own wit. "What can we do you for?"

"Ms. Jane Kiroff. Do you have her?"

"The telepath? Sure, we have her. You know, you won't become a telepath, you'll just think you're one."

"I know, I know. How much?" Rachel was almost at the top of the escalator.

"5 cubic bucks. You still want it?"

Alex threw his credit plaque on the counter. "I'll be back for

this." Snatching up the vial and injector, he turned and ran down the hallway, pushing people out of his way. This was a risky plan at best, but any delay meant sure extinction. Glancing back, he could see Rachel in pursuit. Didn't she ever get tired? Alex's lungs felt as they were about to burst. He pressed the speaker on the injector, and listened to the instructions as he ran.

"Place injector on the carotid artery of the neck. Press injector. New personality will be in place in 30 seconds, and last for 5 minutes."

Alex stopped for a moment, felt the sharp stab of pain as the injector blew the RNA into his artery. He began running again. Now if he could just keep ahead of Rachel for another 30 seconds.

He hadn't counted on the disorientation as the new personality took effect. He couldn't keep his legs moving right. Stumbling, he hit one of the support pillars, losing valuable seconds trying to remember which way he was supposed to be running. Alex has only taken another ten steps when Rachel had hit him from behind. They went down together in a heap. Nearby customers of the mall jumped out of their way.

"I know you're not going to be happy waking up here, boss, but it's the only way." Rachel held onto Alex as he tried to stand and spoke clearly into his ear. Something broke inside his head. Memories of other places, other times, rose unbidden. The flood of alien memories grew, and Alex Hartford felt himself swept away into darkness.

Terra arrived at the escalator just in time to see Rachel leap to the second floor. McTaggart had moved even faster than the department had anticipated, trying to draw in his errant clone. She thumbed her communicator.

"Captain, I'm still in pursuit. The suspect is currently on the second floor of the Springfield mall." "Keep after them, Terra. I have backup in the mall in less than a minute." She heard a pause. "Oh, shit. Terra, be careful. Alex's alarm just went off. That's McTaggart up there now."

Terra drew her gun and activated the tracker on her wrist. Her job had been to follow Alex, try and pull as many of McTaggart's men into the net before drawing it tight. Neither she nor LaPurz had liked the plan, but like so many of the department's policies, it came from the people above. They had already written Alex off, figuring he was going to disappear in a few days, either by reverting, or just being kidnapped and broken down for spare parts in McTaggart's body bank, so why not get some use out of him? They had neither the time nor the inclination to care.

The wrist tracker was following the frequency of the chip in Alex's shoulder. "McTaggart's shoulder.", she corrected herself. It showed no movement. Terra moved silently up

the staircase. She wanted the gun in her hand, and had no desire to repeat the people climbing exhibition she had seen Rachel perform.

The fox was sitting on the floor in a lotus position. Rachel was nowhere in sight. Making sure that Rachel wasn't hiding in ambush, she aimed the gun at McTaggart from the cover of the stairwell.

"We can do this two ways, Andrew. Dead or alive. Your choice."

The fox slowly raised his hands above his head. "Please, Miss. I would much rather do this alive. I've gone through too much to die now."

The lion sat in a comfortably furnished little home. The grey fox sat on the couch across from him.

"I'd like to know how you did it. How you remained Alex after the takeover was triggered."

"We're still not happy with you." Gina glared at the lion as she entered the room, her baby cradled in one arm. "You deliberately used my husband as bait!"

LaPurz held up his hands in a gesture of surrender. "I admit, it wasn't a nice thing to do. But what's done is done. If it's any consolation, we did get three more of McTaggart's men."

She sat down on the couch beside Alex. "Small consolation, playing with Alex's life."

LaPurz decided to steer this conversation back on track. "I would still like to know how you remained you, Alex. You may not be the only clone McTaggart has. It may help others in the same position."

Alex hugged his wife. "I'm really not sure. My original plan was to inject myself with the telepath's memories, then try to put myself back together again after McTaggart took over. What happened is the takeover was triggered while Ms. Kiroff's personality was just starting to take effect."

"But that still doesn't explain what happened."

Alex smiled. "Sure, it does. Imagine that two personalities are trying to take over a body at the same time. Both are disoriented and confused. You're not sure who you are. But one of these personalities is a telepath, knowing the touch of hundreds of minds. Which one would you assume you were?"

The lion nodded. "I can see that. But why aren't you McTaggart now, after the RNA has worn off?"

The fox shrugged. "I don't know. My mind was kind of messed up during that time. As you said, my personality was

designed to be ripped away by the emergence of McTaggart's personality. But his personality was intercepted by the telepath before it ever had a chance to emerge. I can't prove any of this, but it's what I'm guessing."

"Not much help there. The research center said that McTaggart's personality no longer shows up on your EEG scan. They think you might have retained parts of it. Do you have any memories that you didn't have before?"

Alex shook his head. "Sorry."

LaPurz sighed. "Oh, well. Have you considered the offer of working for the police? Our having an exact double of McTaggart would go a long way in helping us nail him."

Gina held onto Alex possessively. "Not on your life. Alex is not going on any undercover jaunts. He's already had enough adventure to last a lifetime. He's staying where it's safe."

The lion looked at her sadly. "He isn't safe yet. It's almost certain that McTaggart will take another shot at him."

Alex patted his wife's arm. "We know. We're figuring on moving out to one of the colonies. Terra says she has a friend who can cover our tracks."

LaPurz nodded. "I understand. That's probably the safest thing for you." He clicked off the recorder in his hand. "Let me know if you remember anything, or if you change your mind about working for us."

Alex opened the door for the lion. "I'll do so. But don't get your hopes up."

Gina was still frowning. "I'm glad he's gone. Dreadful person."

"He's just doing his job, Gina. You can't fault him for that."

"I can when it's your life he was playing with." She gave him a quick kiss and handed him the baby. "Your son wants you to hold him for a while. It's your turn to make dinner, but I'm making it anyway."

Alex laughed. "You're too good to me."

"Not really." she said back. "You still have to do the dishes."

Alex Hartford/Andrew McTaggart grinned back at the baby's toothless smile. Andrew McTaggart had never held his son before. It was a good feeling.

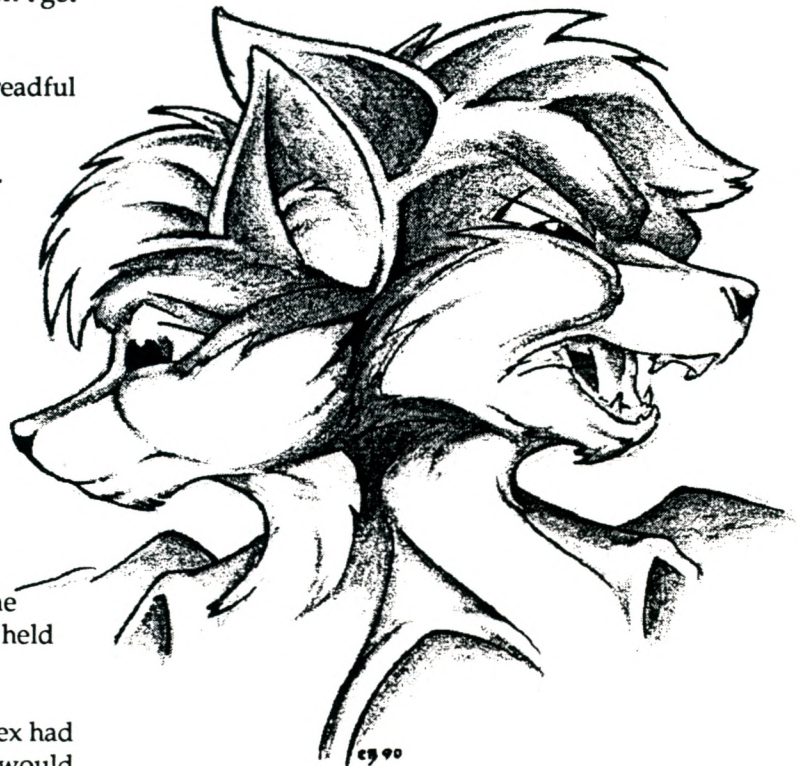
He wasn't worried about LaPurz finding out that Alex had changed. The recording that the police officer made would

be analyzed to see if he had lied. He hadn't lied, he just hadn't told the entire truth.

McTaggart would have been in a bad position to suddenly awaken without any knowledge of what had happened in the years he had existed as Alex Hartford. Alex's personality was not designed to be destroyed, but to be absorbed. He felt no sense of discontinuity. Alex was still Alex Hartford, but he was also Andrew McTaggart. It felt natural, like it should have always been this way. The personality of the telepath may have been temporary, but the effects that it had worked were not. Part of their training included how to help sick or injured minds. McTaggart could remember being ill, and maybe he still was. But he was now in a position where he was in control of his past, rather than letting his past control him. Or, as Ms. Kiroff had said, "A man should be shaped by the events in his life, not twisted by them."

Memories of a childhood hell, of parents who victimized their children rather than nurtured, they were still there, tempered by the realization that they never really happened to him. He was, after all, only four years old. They were no more real to him than Alex's memories of a happy childhood. Both illusions of a past that had never been.

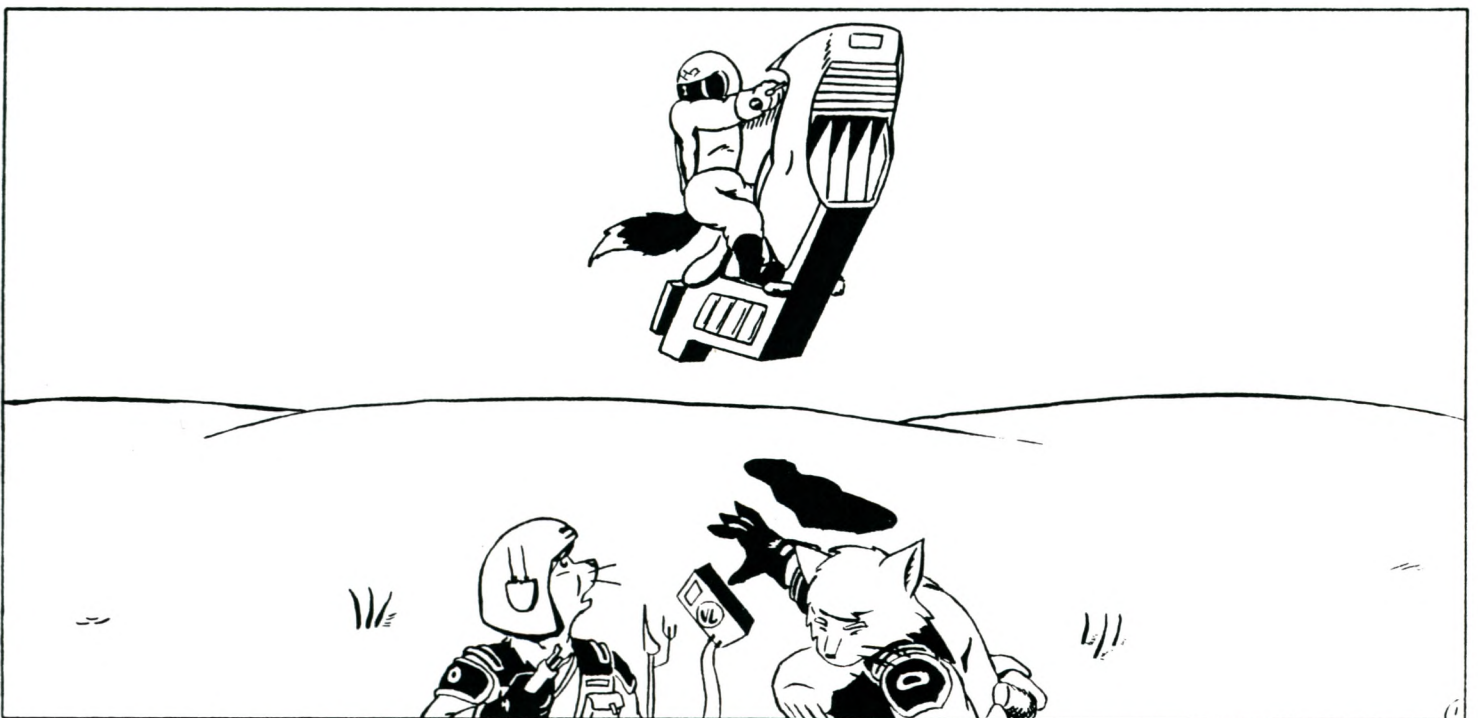
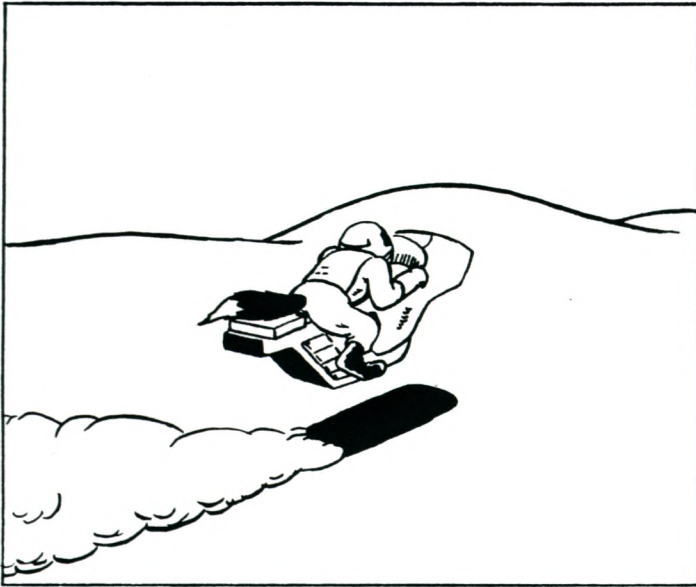
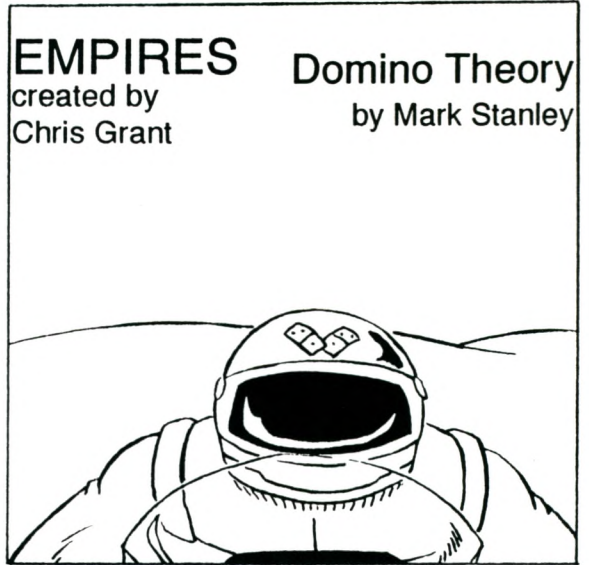
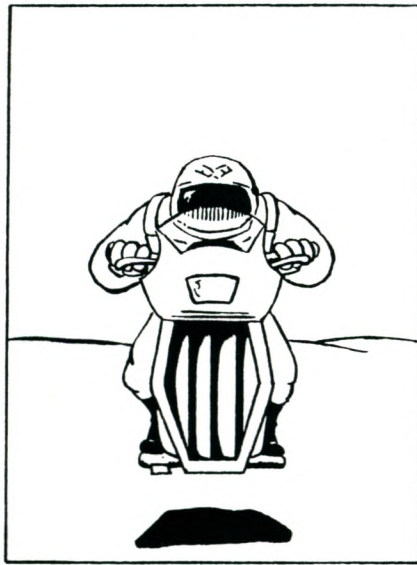
From the kitchen, he could hear Gina moving about. The baby yawned widely in his arms. Alex pushed his son's blanket up under his chin. Andrew McTaggart had often wondered what he'd be like if he hadn't been scarred by his past, if he could just start over with a clean slate. Alex smiled. It looked like he would get the chance to find out. ☹

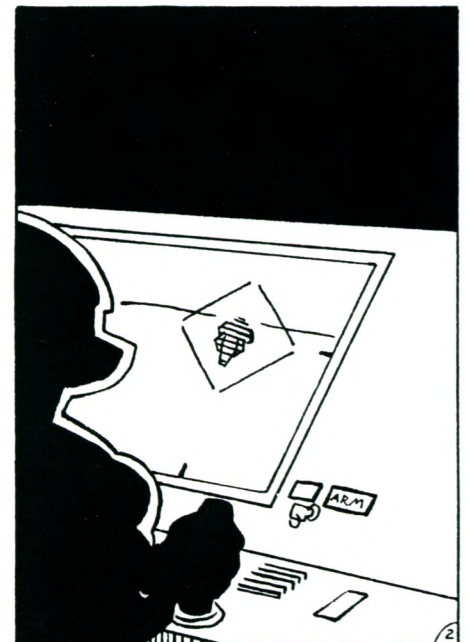
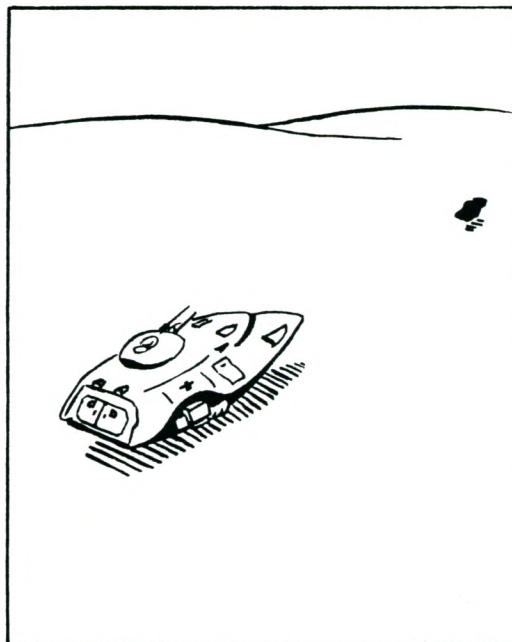
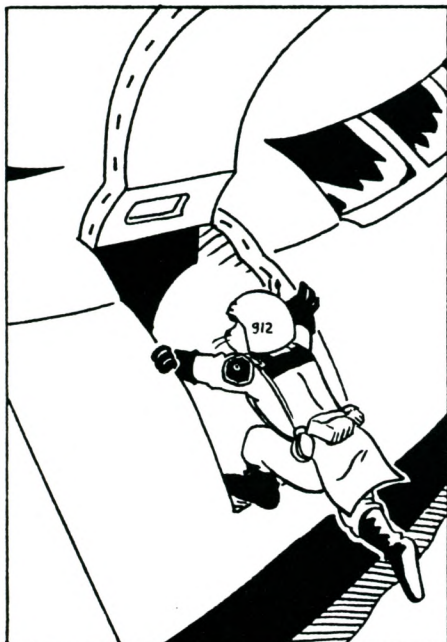
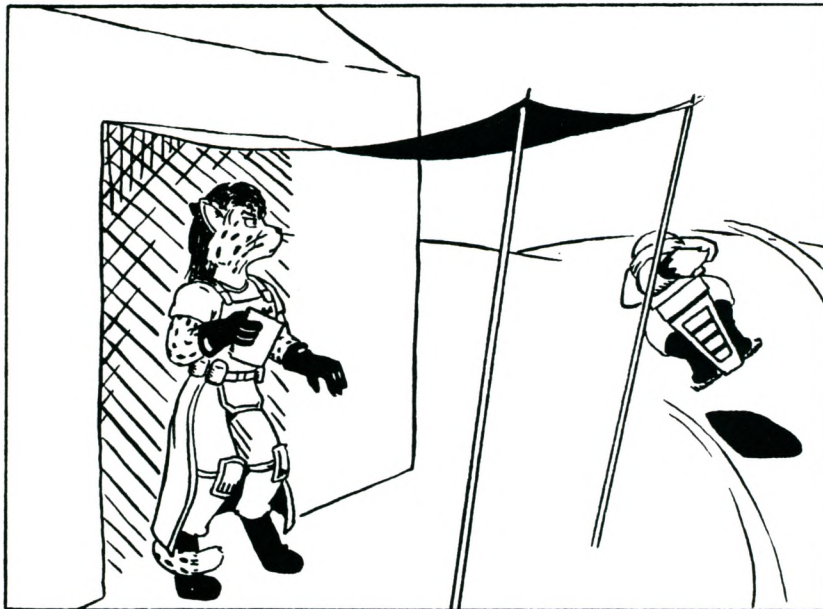
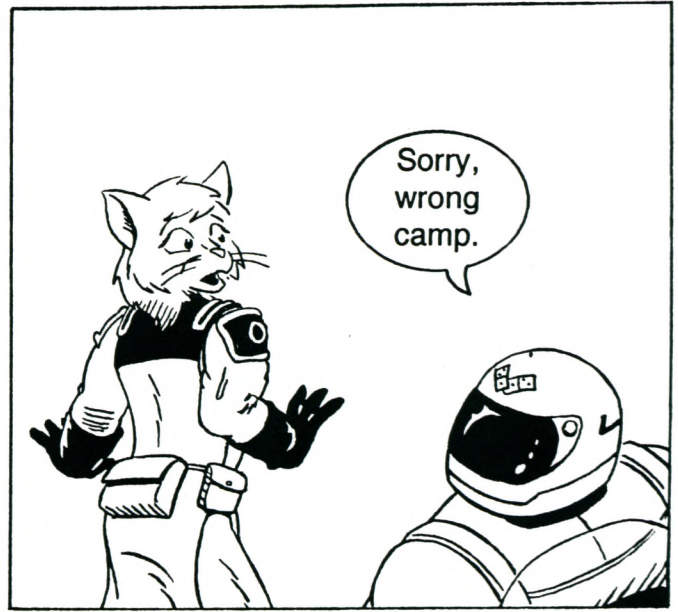
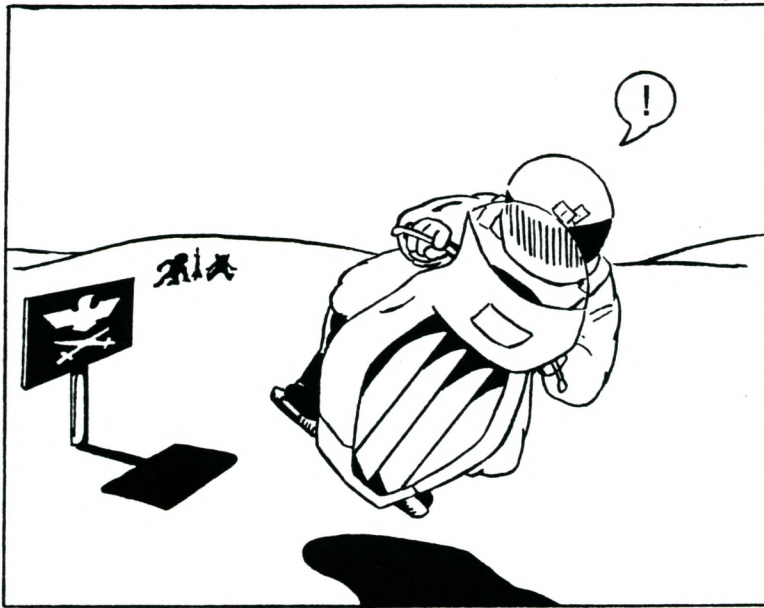


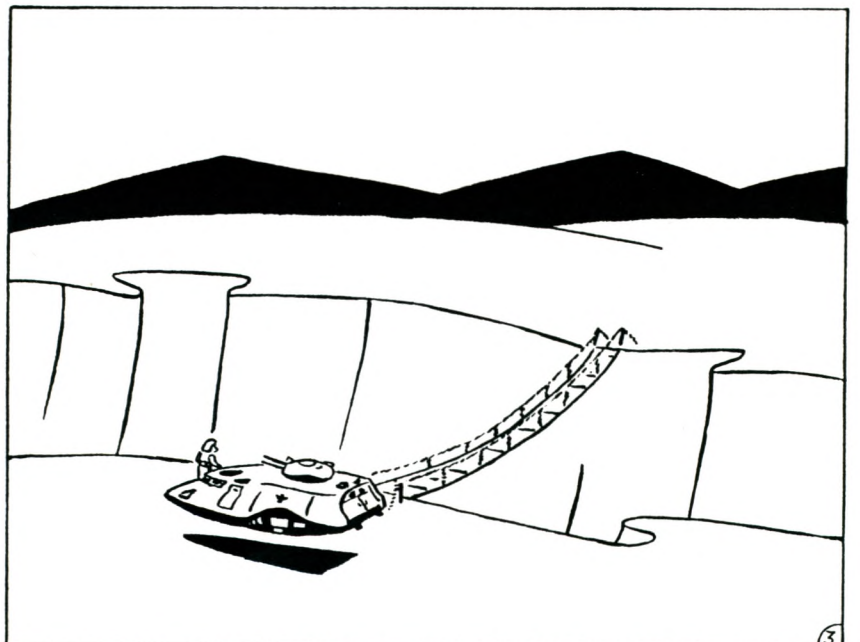
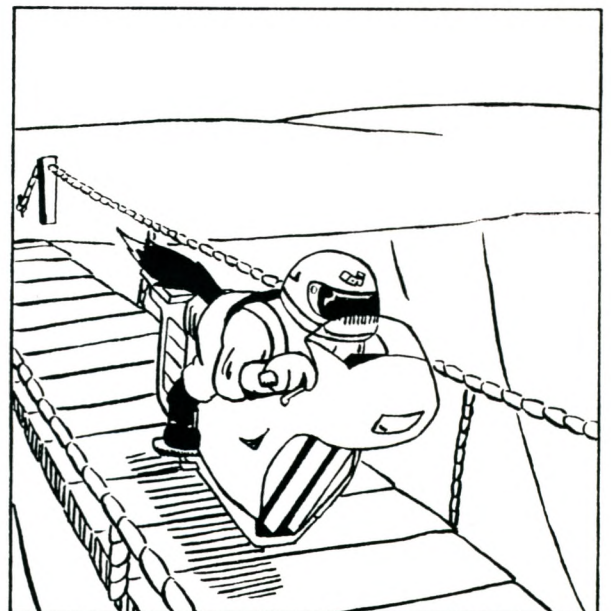
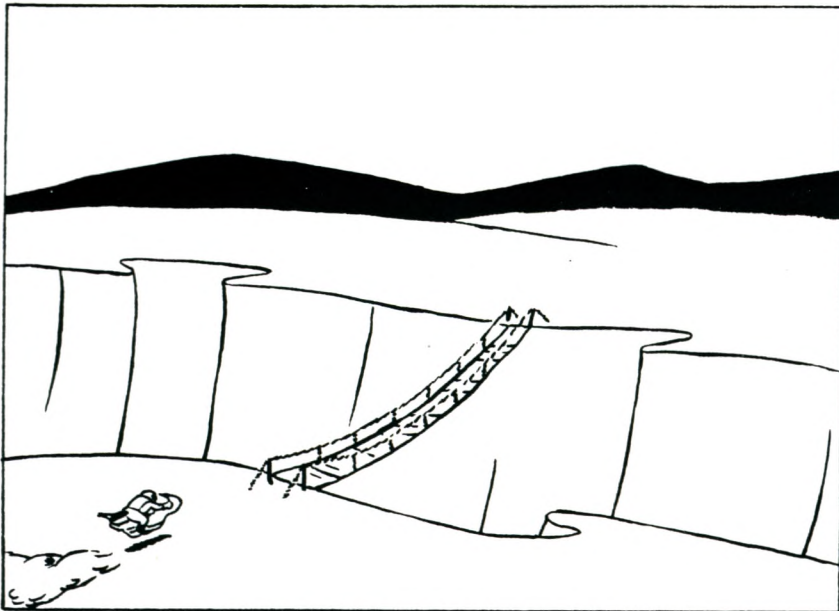
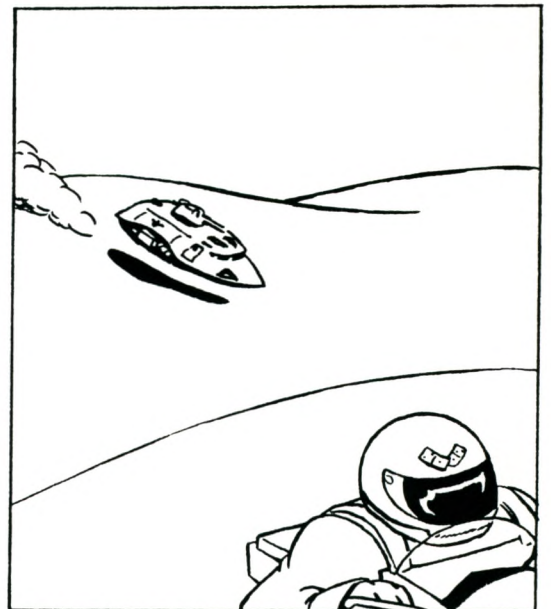
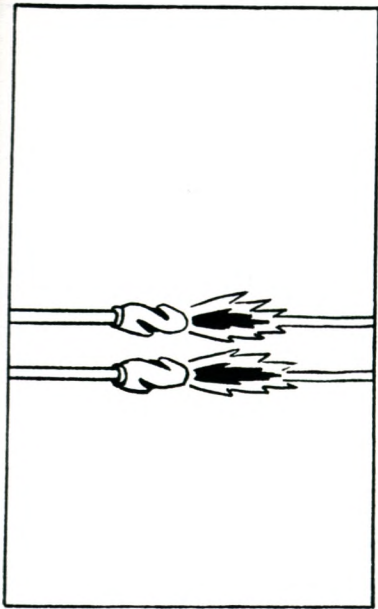


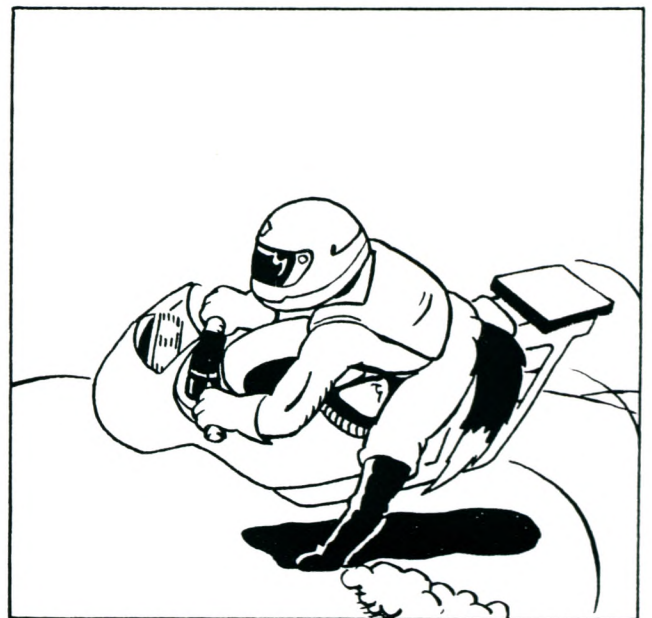
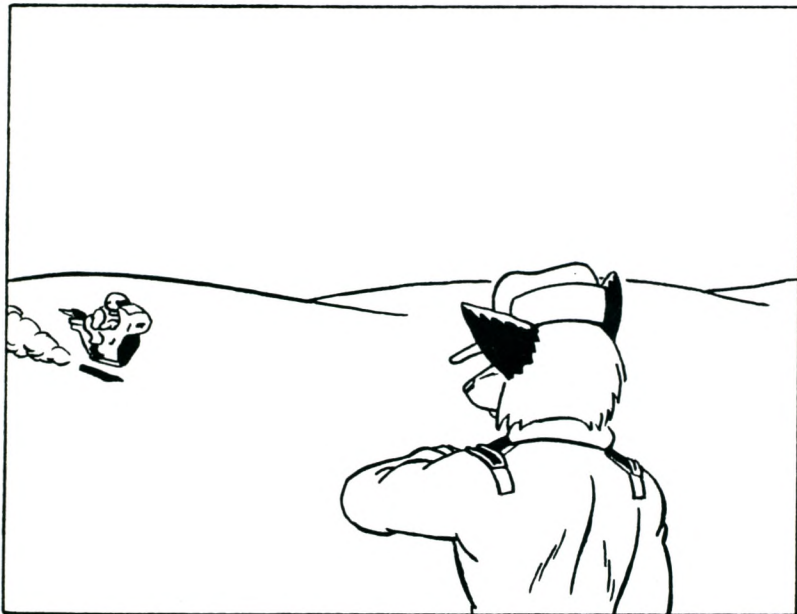
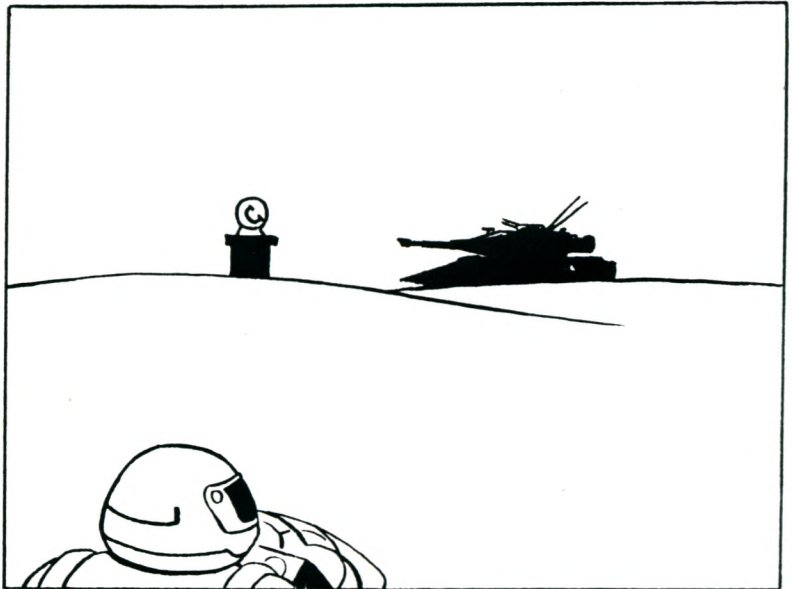
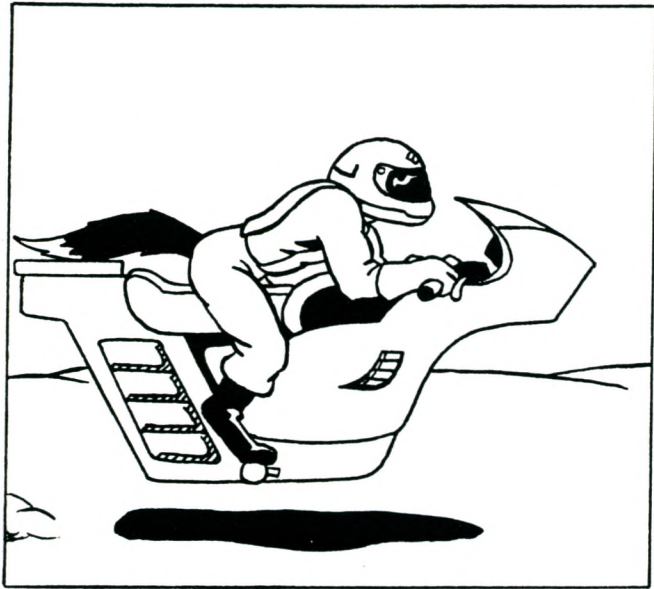
**EMPIRES**  
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**Domino Theory**  
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# The Last Bits

DISPATCHES FROM THE ELECTRONIC FRONT

Users of InterNet (the world-wide network of mainframe computer systems) will probably be interested in the "Furry Mailing List" maintained by Steven Stadnicki. This news group exchanges messages about anything furry, much like the FidoNet systems described in previous issues of YARF!. If you are interested in joining this news group, send mail to Steven Stadnicki at the InterNet address :

SS7M@andrew.cmu.edu(Steven Stadnicki)



## KNOWN FURRY COMPUTER BULLETIN BOARDS:

SYSTEM NAME	SYSTEM OPERATOR	PHONE	PC PURSUIT OUTDIAL	MAXIMUM BAUD RATE	NOTES
The Fur Side	Charlie Kellner	415-571-1486	CAPAL	2,400	
The Tiger's Den	Shayn Raney	714-530-2554	CASAN	2,400	
Kyim's Scratching Post	Kyim Granger	415-452-0350	CAOAK	9,600 (V.42)	
The Polar Den	Darrel Exline	214-361-8992	TXDAL	2,400	
The Otter's Holt	Jerry Case	714-986-1525	n/a	2,400	
Stormgate Aerie	Nicolai Shapero	213-822-6729	CALAN	9,600 (HST)	
Armadillo Connection	Sleeman & Robinson	813-378-2218	n/a	2400	
The Electric Holt	Grenald & DeWeese	315-387-4326	PAPHI	2400	
The Foxes' Den	Lance Rund	408-736-4764	CASJO	19,200 (PEP), 9,600 (HST, V.32)	Official YARF! BBS. 4 lines.



## BORDERLINE

an EMPIRES story

by Chris Grant

appearing in the pages of

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