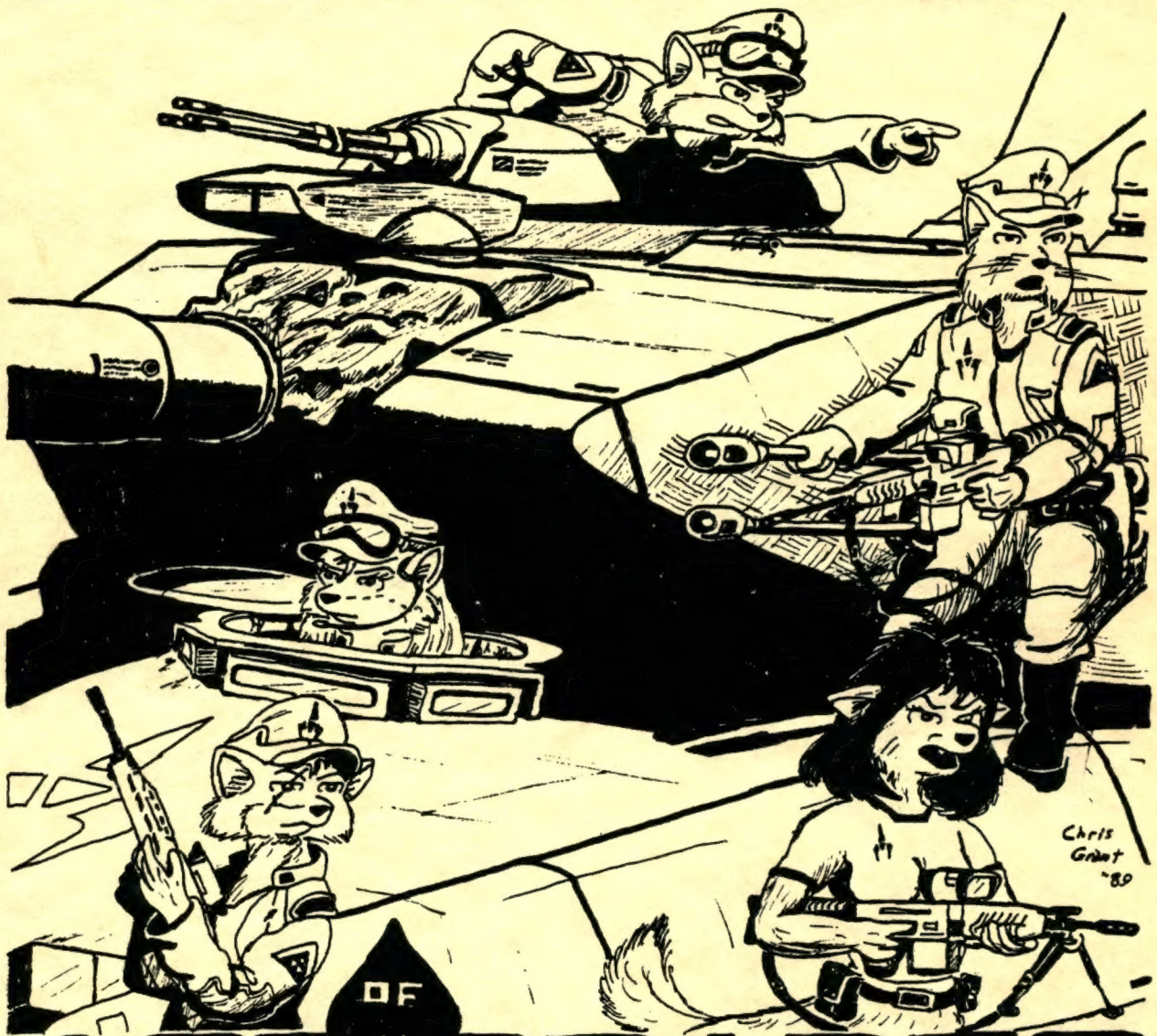


Issue One

\$3.00

# YARF!

THE • JOURNAL • OF • APPLIED • ANTHROPOMORPHICS



ACE <sup>OF</sup> SPADES

# Monika Livingston

## Price List - 1990

### Black & White Character Drawings

	9 x 12	11 x 14
<b><u>Pencils</u></b>		
One Character	\$10	\$20
Two Characters	\$15	\$20
<b><u>Inked</u></b>		
One Character	\$25	\$35
Two Characters	\$30	\$40

*(Larger sizes available, price quotes on request.)*

### Color Character Drawings

	9 x 12	11 x 14
<b><u>Inked, then colored in</u></b>		
One or Two Characters	\$45	\$55

### Full Color Paintings

<b><u>On illustration board</u></b>	
9 x 12 to 11 x 14	\$75 & up
12 x 15 to 20 x 30	\$100 & up

*(Book & game covers, price quotes on request)*

### Matting

<b><u>For drawings &amp; paintings</u></b>	
Up to 11 x 14	\$5 - 10
Up to 20 x 30	\$10 - 25



### Name Tags

<b><u>Small (2 x 3) or large (3 x 4)</u></b>	
Color	\$15 - 45

### Logos

<b><u>Business &amp; stationary</u></b>	
Copyright included	\$75 - 200

### Air-Brushed T-Shirts & Sweat Shirts

	<u>One Side</u>	<u>Two Sides</u>
<b><u>T-shirts</u></b>		
Full Image	\$35 - 45	\$45 - 55
With lettering	add: \$5 - 15	\$10 - 25
Full image on one side, lettering only on other		\$40 - 55
<b><u>Sweat shirts</u></b>		
Full Image	\$40 - 50	\$50 - 60
With lettering	add: \$5 - 15	\$10 - 25
Full image on one side, lettering only on other		\$55 - 70

*(Price quotes for other wearable items on request)*

### NOTES

1. T shirts are American made, 50/50 blend. 100% cotton shirts are available on special request.
2. Romantic images are ok, but X-rated erotica is not accepted.
3. Allow 4 to 6 weeks for delivery, however, time needed for completion may vary depending upon schedule.
4. A deposit of at least 50% is required before any project is started. Balance due upon completion.
5. Mail orders are accepted: add \$3.00 for shipping & handling.

# YARF!

THE • JOURNAL • OF • APPLIED • ANTHROPOMORPHICS

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(415) 433-5457

## Coming up Next Issue

- "Empires" continues Bill Fitts  
Another review from Fred Patten Monika Livingston  
Eric Blumrich Roy Pounds  
"Varcel's" continues More "Freefall"  
More "Robert & Katrina"

YARF! The Journal of Applied Anthropomorphics. Issue Nr.1, January 1990. Published by YARF! P.O. Box 1200, Cupertino, CA 95015-1200. All art and stories © 1990 by the respective artist or author. All other material © 1990 by YARF! No material may be reproduced without permission except for reviews with proper credit. Close Captioned for the hearing impaired. This product contains no fluorocarbons. And, just what is Team Evil anyway?

# Flaming Hairballs

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

Here in your hands is issue 1 of YARF!. We hope that you will enjoy it.

We've tried to bring to you some of today's best anthropomorphic art and storytelling, along with some silliness and information as well.

In this first issue you will find art by Bill Fitts and Shon Howell, Chris Grant, Monika Livingston, Kris Kreutzman, Sue Van Camp, Bryce Nakagawa, Brian O'Connell, Craig Hilton, Mark Stanley, Ken Sample, Ruben Avila, Eric Cavanaugh-Elliott, and newcomer Maggie De Alarcon. Stories in this issue are by Doug Durbrow and Pete Glaskowsky. Fred Patten is beginning a series of reviews of current anthropomorphic

books and articles that should be of interest to everybody.

As with any new magazine we are always looking for more artists and authors, and encourage you to contribute to YARF!. Remember that as a contributor you will receive extra copies of the issues that your work appears in, to give away to family or friends or if you are working toward a job in writing or drawing a place to show that you have been published.

So, enjoy the show. Tell your friends. Don't hesitate to send in a submission. TAKE OUT A SUBSCRIPTION! (hint, hint). Let us know what you think of all this foolishness. And see you around in 40 or 50 days for more fun and games.

Jeff Ferris  
Editor/Publisher

## DEADLINES...DEADLINES...DEADLINES

Miserable things, eh! But necessary to run a magazine. Sorry that some are so short but you know how it goes.

Issue 2, February 9, 1990, Hopefully in time for Eclecticon 4.

Issue 3, March 23, 1990, Right about the time for Norwescon.

Issue 4, May 5, 1990, Time to get your stuff in for Baycon 90.

Issue 5, June 16, 1990, Right on target for Westercon/Chicago ComiCon

Issue 6, July 28, 1990, For the big San Diego ComiCon.

Issue 7, September 8, 1990, Right after WorldCon/NASFIC.

Issue 8, October 20, 1990, About a month before SiliCon/LosCon 90.

Issue 9, December 1, 1990, How about a Christmas/Hanukkah issue.

And so forth into the New Year.

Coming up in the future: fiction from Doug Durbrow, Pete Glaskowsky, Dave White, Mike Riley and a few surprises from people that you don't expect written stories from. There will be more art from all of the contributors to this issue, as well as Eric Blumrich, Dave Bryant, Steve Corbett, Roy Pounds, Juan Alfonso, Ken Pick, Ken Mitchrone, Zjonn and others. ☺

YARF!?  
WHAT KIND OF  
NAME IS YARF?

MOOSE  
COSTUMES?



# Patten's Pontifications

## Review: Howling Mad

Reviewed by Fred Patten

Howling Mad, by Peter David. Ace Books, New York, November 1989, 201 pages, \$3.50. ISBN 0-441-34663-4

Howling Mad is not the first werewolf tale about a wolf that turns into a man rather than the familiar vice-versa, but it may be the first to use that concept for a serious novel rather than a one-gimmick short story.

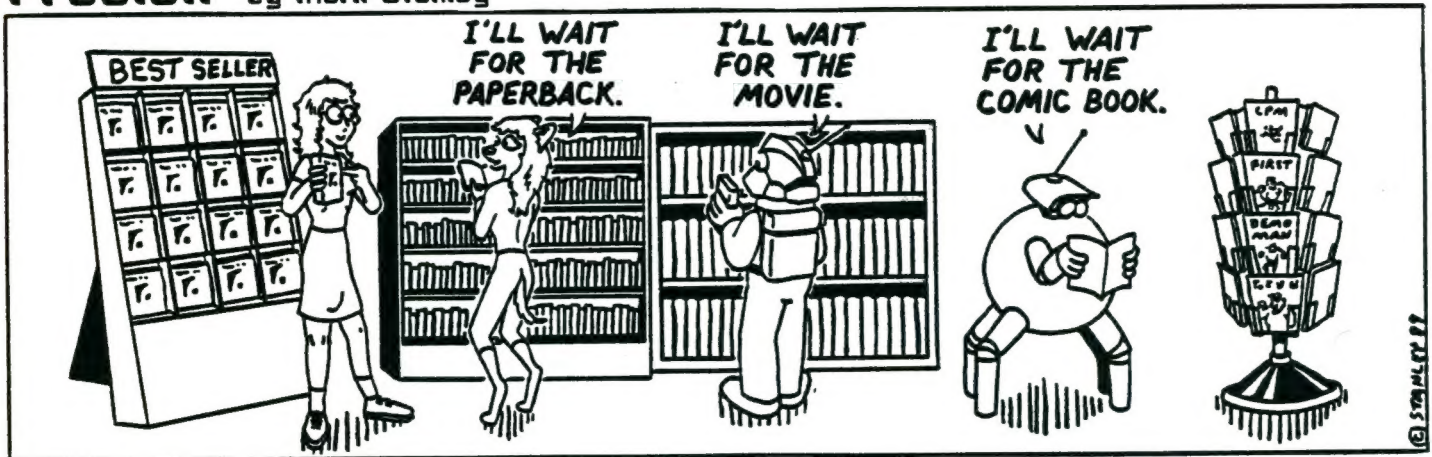
Not that Howling Mad is completely serious. At one point, Darlene introduces the humanized wolf, Joshua, to movies by taking him to see "An American Werewolf in London". That's a joke, but it's also Peter David's acknowledgement of the novel's model. The plot is original, but the basic concept and the mixture of black comedy and horror is too similar to be coincidental. Yet there is a key difference. Landis' movie is a quirky thriller in which the werewolf hero is powerless to alter his doom. David's novel is a quirky thriller in which Joshua the werewolf (wereman?) has considerably more freedom of action. The story keeps the reader guessing what will happen to him, except for the fact that there will be a happy ending because the novel is told by Joshua as a flashback.

A demonic werewolf (eight feet tall, bipedal, with fiery eyes) is terrorizing a Canadian town and forest. It attacks both men and animals. The only survivor of one of its attacks is the leader of the local wolf pack, who is badly enough wounded that it is unable to escape when found by hunters. The wolf is sold to a New York City zoo, which is where he is when the next full moon turns him into a man. The novel relaxes and segues into his

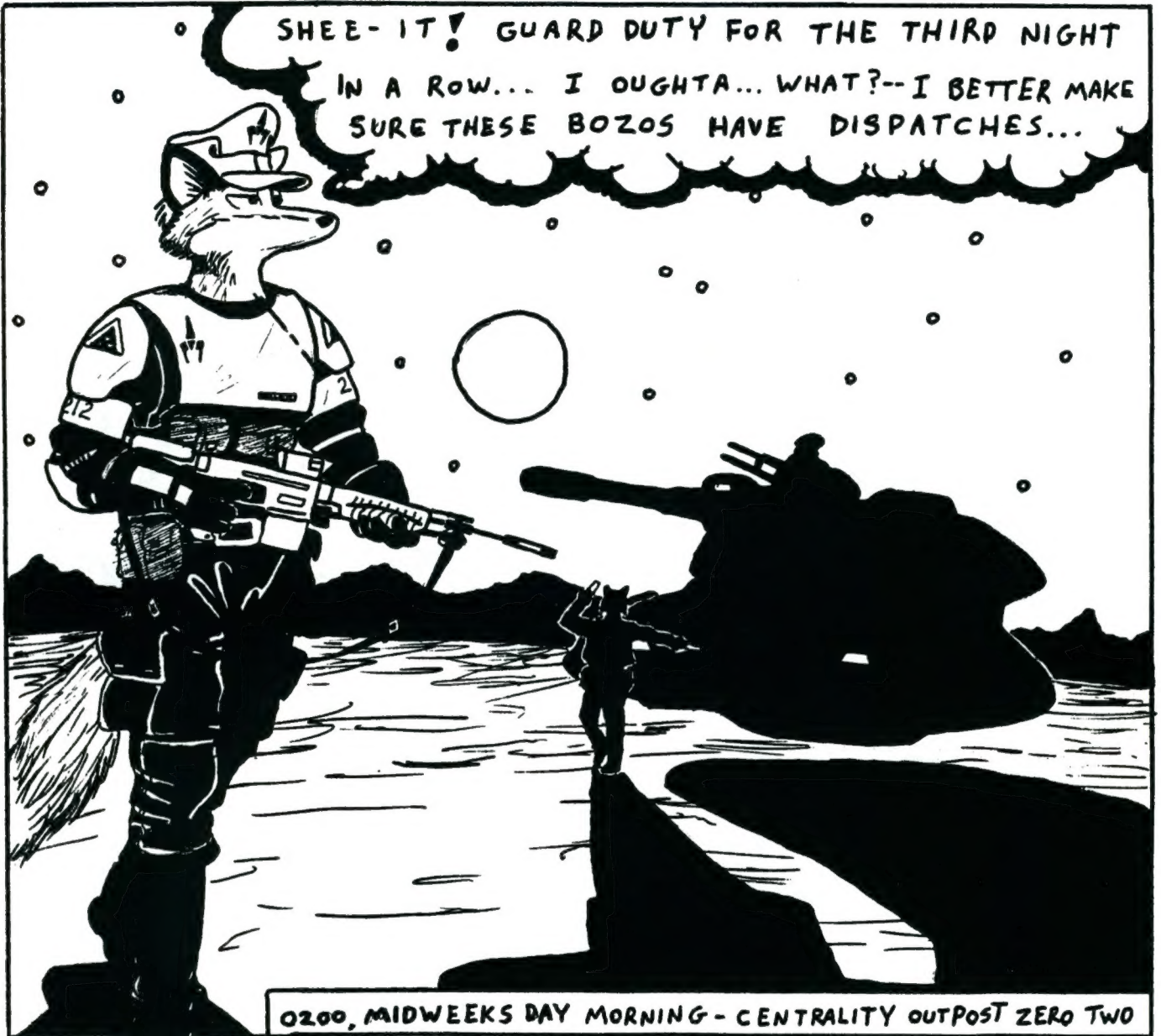
humorous misadventures as he encounters Darlene, an animal-rights activist who can't hold onto a boyfriend. She determines to teach him human ways. Yet he is only human for a couple of days each month; the rest of the time he's a wolf being hidden in a no-pets-allowed apartment house. He is also a wolf who feels an obligation to his pack and mate, and is torn between his developing relationship with Darlene and his need to return to his forest to help defend it against the monster. And the demonic werewolf has his own agent in New York to strike against Joshua.

This comedic thriller is primarily about humans, but there are plenty of clever anthropomorphic incidents in it. When Joshua tells of his life as leader of his pack, it's a good realistic wolf's-eye description of lupine sociology. When the wolf turns human, he gains human intelligence but not knowledge (David essentially admits that he stretches coincidence pretty thin in keeping Joshua free in the midst of New York long enough to figure out speech and the necessity of wearing clothes). When he turns wolf again, he retains his human memories but they are compressed by his wolf's intellect. This enables Joshua to make many sardonic comments about civilization from the viewpoint of an intelligent animal while he is human. After he becomes a wolf again, David plausibly describes how his wolf's memory of what he learned as a human might help him battle the demon. Joshua is more rightly characterized than a fictional wolf who conveniently has human intelligence. Howling Mad is a novel that is definitely worth adding to Furry reading lists. ☺

## Freefall by Mark Stanley

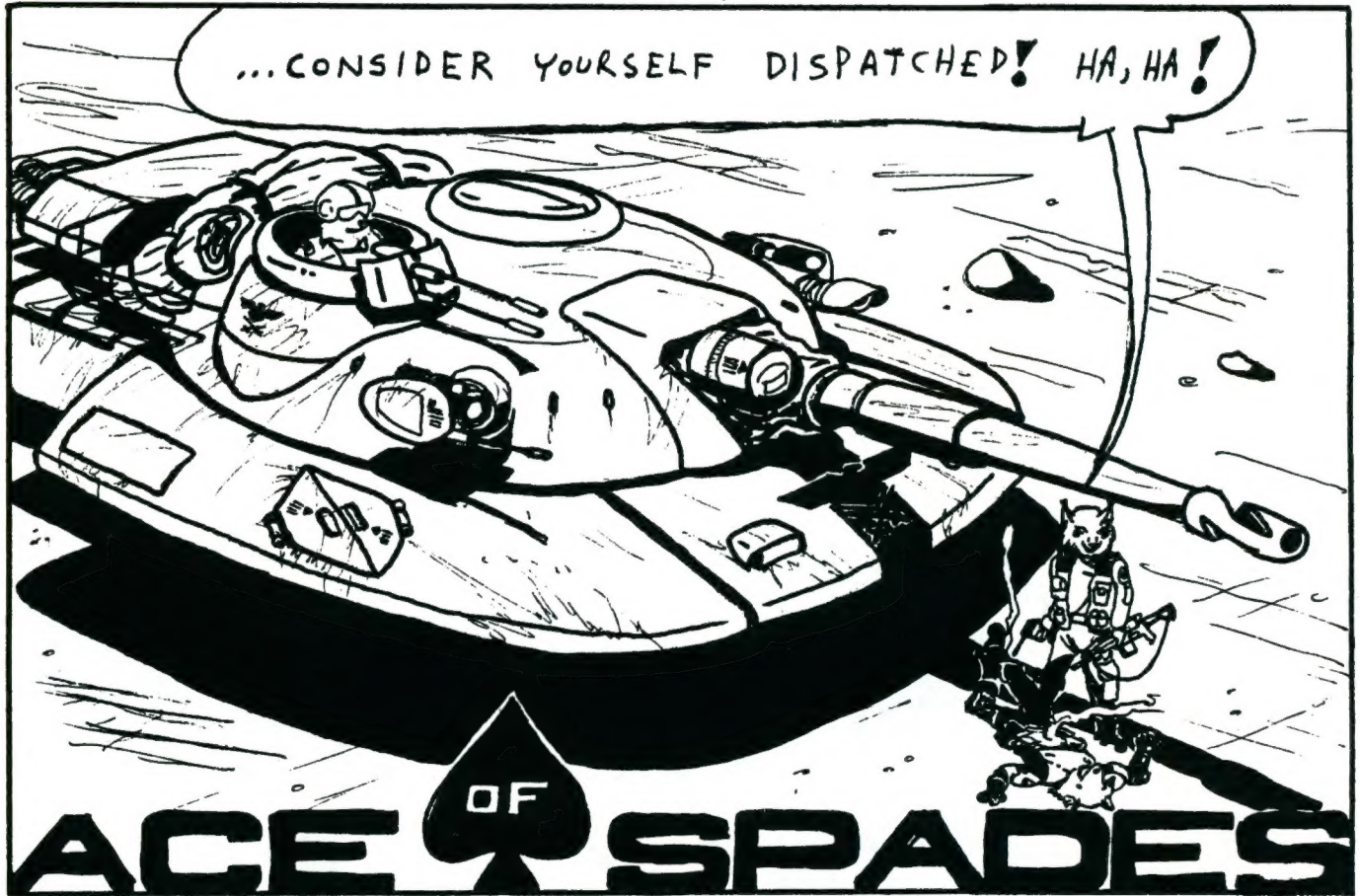


# EMPIRES

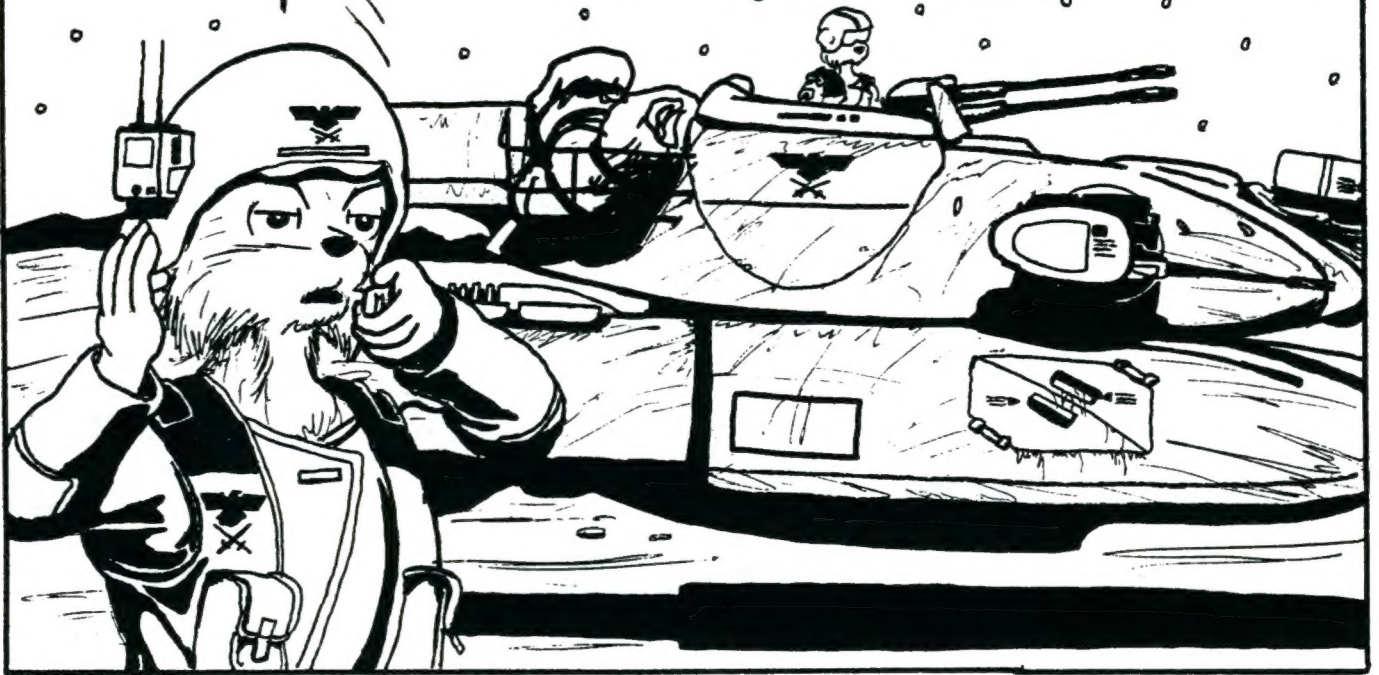




STORY, ART, AND INKS BY CHRIS GRANT '90



ANVIL TO HAMMER. CENTRAL ZERO TWO BREACHED...  
BEGIN OPERATION IRON FORGE. WILL PROCEED TO  
COM-SHACK IMMEDIATELY. ANVIL OUT.



FAR OUT IN THE DESERT, 'HAMMER' AWAITS: FIVE HUNDRED  
SOLDIERS OF THE IRRIKANOI EMPIRE...

LIEUTENANT! THE WORD IS GIVEN!  
ASSEMBLE YOUR PEOPLE FOR THE ASSAULT!

ALL ELEMENTS  
CHECK FOR POSITIVE  
CHARGE ON ALL PERSONAL  
WEAPONS!

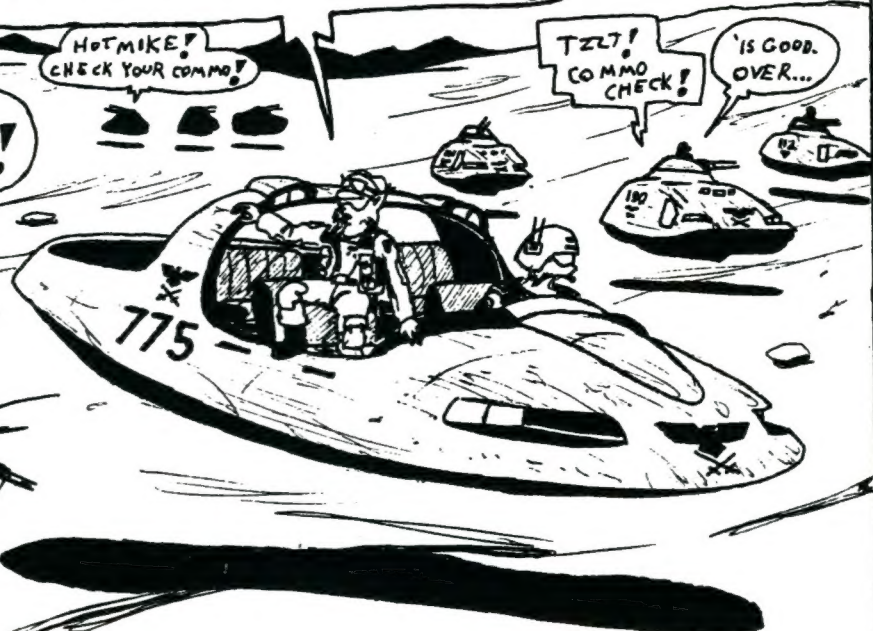
HOT MIKE!  
CHECK YOUR COMMO!

TZLT!  
COMMO  
CHECK!

'IS GOOD.  
OVER...

SECOND  
PLATOON TO  
MY LEFT!

SIR!



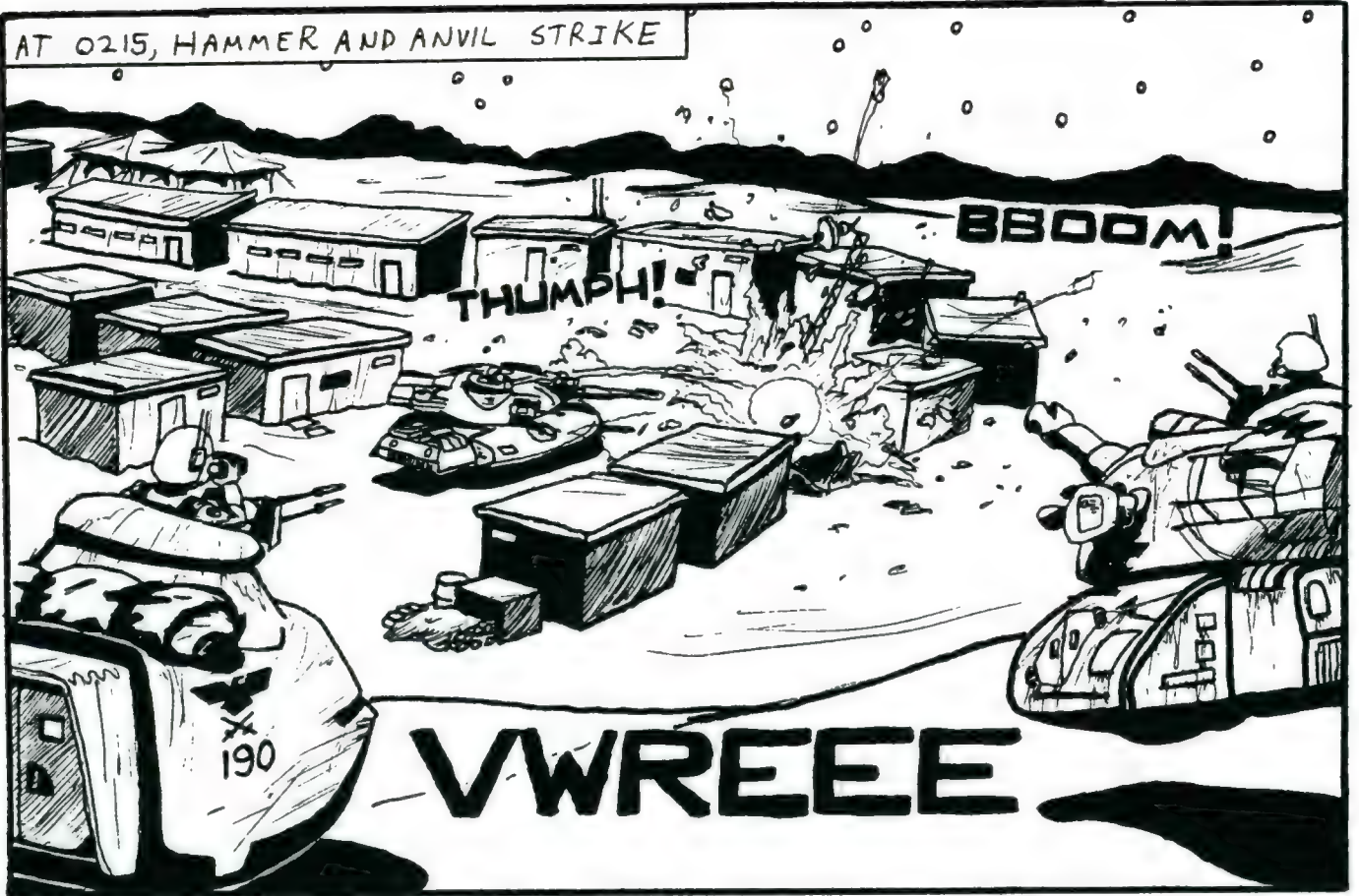
AT 0210, THE 'HAMMER' SWINGS. THE ONE-FIFTY-FIRST LIGHT INFANTRY BATTALION IS REINFORCED BY ELEMENTS OF THE EIGHTY-THIRD ARMOR BRIGADE

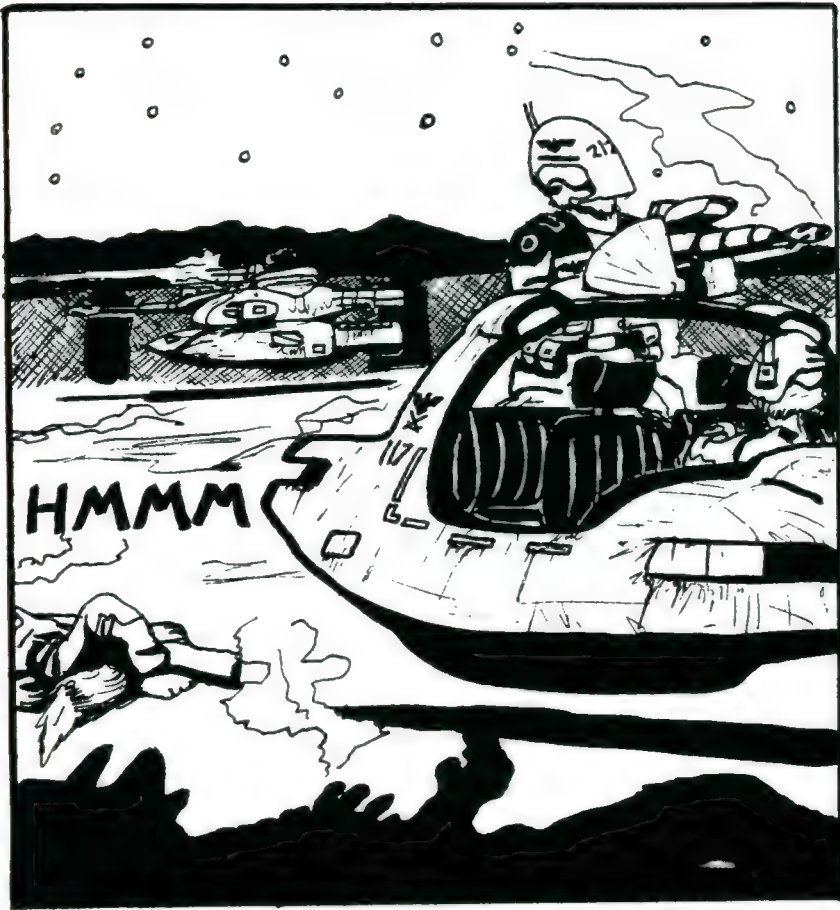


'ANVIL' IS A PART OF THAT BRIGADE. ALONE, ITS DUTY IS TO PENETRATE CENTRALITY OUTPOST ZERO-TWO AND DESTROY ITS SATELLITE COMMUNICATIONS CENTER...



AT 0215, HAMMER AND ANVIL STRIKE

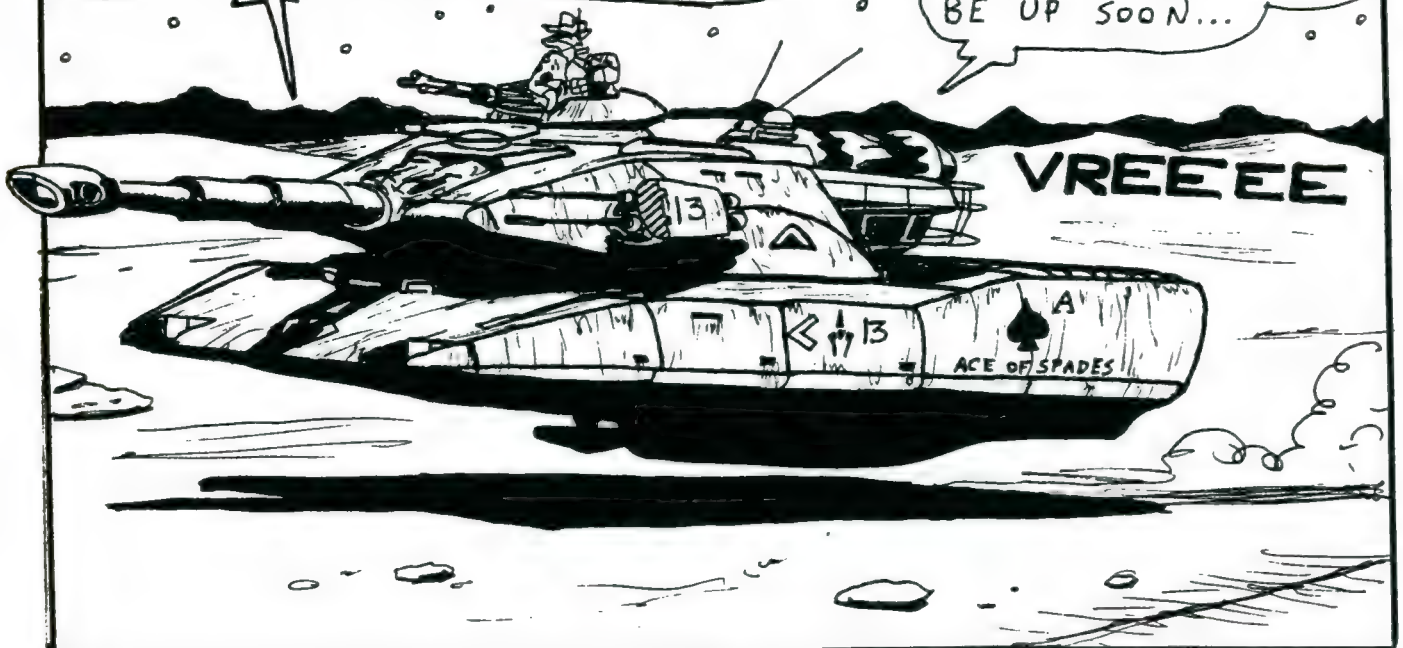




THE DESERT: BAKING HOT BY DAY, FREEZING COLD AT NIGHT. A TANK, ALONE, IS RETURNING FROM A ROUTINE SCOUT MISSION.

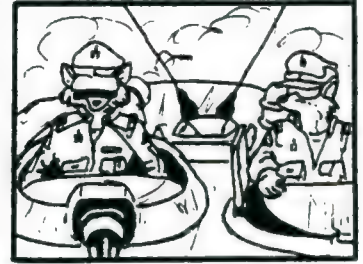
THYSSA! IT'S FUCKING COLD IN HERE EVEN WITH THE HEATER ON!

TAKE A CHILL PILL BABE. IT'S 0530. SUN'LL BE UP SOON...



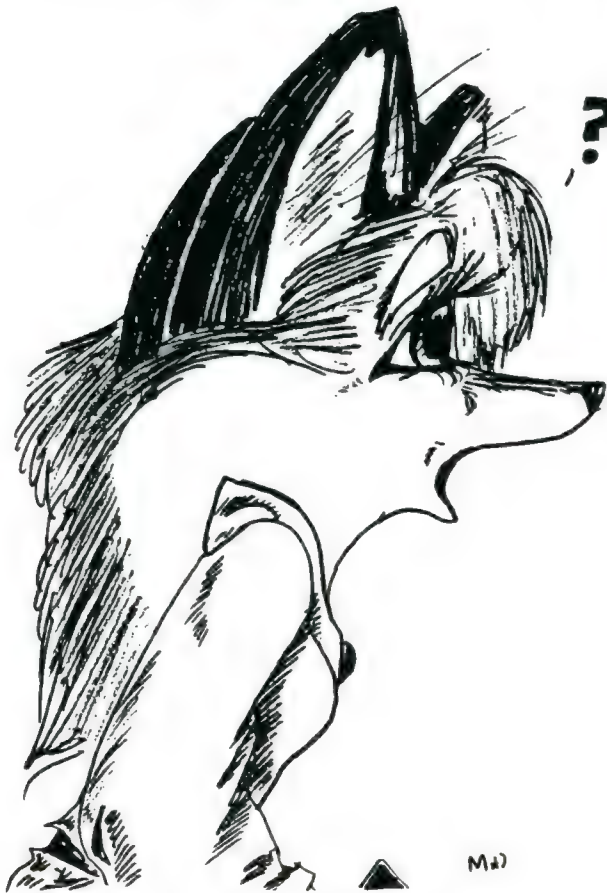


THE 'ACE OF SPADES' ACCELERATES TO 110 mph, RACING FOR OUTPOST ZERO TWO...





M2



M2



I'll try  
and send  
better  
soon!  
M2



# Melanie

By Peter Glaskowsky

Illustrations by Brian O'Connell

It was a warm August night, blessedly free of the muggy heat which is typical for southern Florida. I was dressed for the beach; cutoff jeans, a Hawaiian shirt unbuttoned almost to the waist, Topsiders, the usual thing. I was lying on a chaise lounge, watching the last glow of sunset fade away.

I wasn't at the beach, though. I was on a grassy hill on the edge of a large automobile junkyard. I'd been on my way to the beach some hours earlier, but then I got a call on the car phone, and never made it. Instead, I was sitting around waiting for something to happen. Two things, actually. One was due in about fifteen minutes, but the other one happened first.

I had darn good hearing then, considering they were still my own ears, but I never heard her. I was lucky to see her. I just happened to look off to the side, towards the entrance of the yard, and saw a brief flash of gray as she slipped inside.

I couldn't see her, but I knew who she had to be.

"Come on up, it's okay," I said, conversationally. I knew she'd be able to hear me. You couldn't get better ears than hers.

There was no response. I decided I needed to give her a reason to stay, before she decided to leave.

"I have your son."

Ever say something, and know it was exactly the wrong thing to say? Well, if I hadn't known it then, I would have figured it out pretty quickly.

She came out of nowhere, up the hill in three long bounds, knocking over the radio which sat silently beside me, and planted a huge paw on my chest, claws extended and barely touching my throat. She growled, and I began to think I'd made a mistake somewhere. But no, I was certain I was right.

"Sorry, didn't mean it to sound so sinister," I said, trying to remain calm. "He's okay."

She didn't move. She just kept staring at me, gaping slightly, giving me a good view of all those teeth. Then I had it.

"You're trying to pass for a natural lioness, aren't you?"

That was it! I could see it in her eyes, and hear it in her voice when she spoke. She didn't have the cultured tones of the average Smartcat. Her voice was rough, almost a growl, as if she wasn't used to using it.

"Where is my son?" she asked. Her claws made her point for her. I tried to take a deep breath before replying, but I couldn't.

"He's in my car."

"...He's asleep!" I called as she leaped away towards my car, which was parked in the driveway just behind me.

I twisted around in the chair, and saw her look inside. Then she reared up, planted one paw on the side of the door, and reached in with the other one through the half-open window. I was glad I'd left the windows partway open. I had a feeling she would still have reached inside if they'd been closed.

She couldn't reach her son, who was curled up on the driver's seat just below her. He was sleeping pretty soundly. We'd spent the afternoon playing around, mostly mock combat in the ancient way of all lion cubs. I'd even fed him a couple hours ago, a bottle of formula brought over by a vet I knew.

So he didn't wake up, despite the battering his mother was giving my car. She dropped to the ground, turned to face me, and so help me God, she hissed at me.

"Open it. Now."

She hadn't tried the door handle, and I didn't want her to just yet, so I refrained from telling her that the car was unlocked.

"Look, I didn't kidnap your son. He was lost, and I found him. I've been waiting for you to come get him. We've been playing games, he's been fed, and now he's asleep. If you'll just relax for a few minutes, I'll drive you both home, ok?"

Well, I guess that was the right thing to say, since she seemed to relax. She even got polite.

"I... thank you. I'm sorry, I've been looking for him all day. Could you open the door, please, I'd like to make sure he's okay."

That was more like it. I don't like servility, but courtesy is good. And fair is fair, I thought.

"It's unlocked."

She gave me the lion equivalent of an embarrassed look and opened the door. She had a little trouble with the handle, since it was designed for human fingers, not a Smartcat's long claws and small thumb, but she figured it out quickly enough. She gathered up her son in one foreleg, and kind of limped over to where I was sitting. She sat down, hugging her son to her chest. He was making little mewling noises, cranky at being awakened, but he settled down soon enough.

"What's his name?"

"Paul," she answered, with obvious pride.

"What's yours?"

"Melanie."

"Hi, I'm Joe." I sat up and turned sideways, and stuck my hand out. Under other circumstances, it might have been a threatening gesture, but she had herself under control. She just extended her right fore-paw, and we "shook hands".

I told her about the call I'd received from the junkyard's weekend custodian. I'd met the old man a while back while scavenging parts for an old truck I owned, and he knew I'd be interested in a stray lion cub. I went over right away, and spent the afternoon waiting there, making phone calls. I didn't want to take the cub anywhere, in case someone showed up here looking for him.

Nobody had filed a report, which was strange. It was plain to me from the start that he wasn't a natural lion cub anyway. He wasn't talking yet, but his intelligence was obvious. I had a lot of experience with lion cubs of his age— about three months, I'd guess—and there was never one born that was as sharp as he was. He was already able to conduct a credible stalk, and he had an uncanny ability to guess where I was going to throw a ball.

Within a year, he'd be able to outcompete any human six-year-old in a regular school. If they let him, which of course they wouldn't.

Nobody just loses a Smartcat cub. Smartcats weren't property, but they weren't really free, either. There weren't many of them around— this was only twenty years after they were Uplifted, as I knew all too well— about 200, I think. They were all indentured to humans, mostly to wealthy families, or businesses. Some were nominally bound to various civil liberties and animal rights groups which had essentially bought them their freedom, and these enjoyed a certain degree of legal autonomy.

Regardless, a Smartcat cub wasn't going to get loose without someone reporting it. They were just too valuable. And of course, they had Smartcat mothers, who were fiercely protective, as we've seen.

I started to ask Melanie about this, and then my watch started beeping. Talking and thinking had used up those fifteen minutes, and it was time for my favorite show. Melanie watched as I shut off my watch and checked a compass heading, and I explained.

"It's my satellite. It's going to pass right over us in about a minute. See that TV tower there, blinking? It'll come over just to the left of that, a little above the top." I pointed, and she found it.

"About fifteen seconds now."

We sat and watched as my satellite went over. Conditions were perfect. The sun had been down just long enough to put the atmosphere above us in shadow, but not long enough to shade the satellite's orbit. Plus I'd cheated. I'd placed a call to the ground control people earlier in the day, and they'd programmed the satellite to rotate the solar panels as it went over to reflect the sun down at us.

It worked perfectly. It blazed magnificently as it passed directly overhead.

I'd meant to share this with some friends at the beach, but I think I liked it better this way. Melanie was obviously enraptured, and even Paul had caught sight of the bird. I guess Melanie must have woken him up, but I didn't see her do it.

There was the inevitable comic moment as the satellite went over, and we all put off turning around until we were leaning over too far backwards to do it comfortably. I think Paul got distracted just then, because he started moving around, and his mother had to grab him to keep him from walking off. He seemed to do this a lot. No wonder he'd gotten lost.

I lost sight of the satellite as it approached the far horizon. Melanie seemed to be able to follow it for several more seconds, and then she looked over at me.

"That was yours?"

"Yes," I said, with some pride of my own. "That's my baby."

"Thank you for letting me see it," she said.

"It's beautiful, isn't it?" I mused.

She was busy for a moment, trying to get Paul to calm down again, but it wasn't working. "Could you take us back, please?"

"Where to?" I asked, although I was pretty sure I knew where.

"We're with the circus."

I was right. A rather rinky-dink little circus had arrived in town earlier in the day. It was about the only idea I'd had when the cub turned up, especially since the caravan had come past here on the way in, but I'd checked with a friend in the police department, and the circus hadn't reported any missing cats, Smart or otherwise.

Well, I'd brought it up before, and she'd let it slide. I'd have to say it again.

"Look, are you sure you want to go back there?"

"Why? What do you mean?" She was definitely looking nervous now.

"They'll figure it out eventually, you know, that you're a Smartcat. How did you manage to get into a circus as a natural lion, anyway?"

She started looking around, as if for an escape route. Finally, she simply said, "Just take us back, please."

I'm stubborn, too. Ask anyone.

"If you're in trouble, tell me. I want to help, if I can. I can help. I have a lot of friends."

"Why do you want to help me? You don't even know me." She sounded suspicious, and I suppose she had good reason to be. My motives weren't very clear, even to me. If she was in trouble, I could get into trouble, and I had a lot to lose.

But then, so did she.

"Tell me why you're passing for a natural lion."

She didn't respond. She just looked down at the ground. Or at her son, who was still trying to get away. Was I going to have to guess all of it?

"You ran away from somewhere, didn't you? You're hiding out. But you couldn't have just joined the circus on your own."

"No," she said quickly. Then, perhaps deciding that she was going to have to trust me, she began to explain. "I did run away. I was working for a man, I was supposed to protect his daughter. But she needed to be protected against him more than anyone. She wanted to run away, and I let her. He suspected me of helping her, and even after she came back, I was worried that he might try to hurt me. Then when I got pregnant, I knew I had to leave."

Ah, that explained a lot. But not everything.

"And how'd you get into the circus?"

"You don't need to know, do you?" she asked.

"I need to know if they think they have clear legal title to you. If you're protecting someone, I can respect that."

"Thank you," she said, gravely. "Yes, a man helped me. He used forged papers to sell me to the circus. They believe it was legal."

"Good."

That was most of it. After a moment of thought, I had the rest of it.

"This man's name is Green, isn't it? Paul Green?" I looked significantly at her son. The look on her face was all the confirmation I needed. If she'd been in a bad mood, I'd have been worried about all those teeth, but she was just surprised.

"How did I know? Simple. I heard Green was trying to sell a lioness a few months ago. He wasn't asking much, either. I couldn't figure out why he didn't call me. Most of the big zoos and circuses in the country know I breed lions. Now I understand. He knew I'd recognize you even without your mark."

That had been bothering me. Smartcats have a diamond-shaped white spot on their foreheads. Paul had one, although you had to know what you were looking for; it blended in with his mottled coloration. Melanie didn't have a mark.

"Paul found a veterinary surgeon to remove that. It cost a lot of money."

"I'm sure it was worth it. But what did you plan to do when your son started showing his intelligence? And his mark? You couldn't hide that forever."

"We were prepared to leave again, when we had to."

"Hmm. You know, I heard about your escape from, ah, what was

his name? McNab? It was in my news summary at the time. I just didn't put the two together. Too bad. If I had, I'd probably have been able to help."

"You'd have done that?"

"I'd like to think so." The next question would be "why?", and I didn't want to have to answer that yet, so I went quickly on.

"Do you see why you can't go back to the circus? And why haven't they reported you missing yet, anyway?"

"They have me in a closed cage while I'm nursing Paul. I get fed in the morning, and if I don't make any noise, they don't bother me. They saw me in there when we stopped at the fairgrounds, so they probably won't look again until tomorrow morning."

"We'll have something set up before then," I reassured her.

"What?"

"I have a plan," I said. Either she wasn't very curious, or she recognized the cliché. She didn't ask for an explanation, but just let me get right into it.

I called up my friend on the police force.

"Hey, Johnnie, remember that missing lion cub I was telling you about? Well, its mother came sniffing after it. I bet you they're from that circus. They both look pretty bad. I don't know if it's from walking around the city all day, or if the circus was maltreating them, but I think it'd be best if they didn't go back just yet."

He said something about how strange it was that they hadn't been spotted by anyone else, and I laughed, and agreed with him.

"Listen, Johnnie, do me a favor, will you? If the circus isn't treating them right, I may want to buy them. They look pretty shabby, but they seem smart, and I bet they'll clean up okay..."

"Yeah, Johnnie, shabby tabbies, right, that's very good." What a sense of humor he had. What sense of humor?

"Anyway, give them a call, tell them I've found their cats, and then lean on them a little. Ask them how two lions can escape without being noticed. Play up the public safety thing. And then let on that I might want to buy them, but for crying out loud, don't tell them I told you to say so.

"No, Johnnie, I know you're not dumb. Sorry, I'm sure you'll do it fine. Thanks for the help. Yes, I'll put something in the mail tomorrow. Bye." I hung up. Good friends don't come cheap.

I turned back to Melanie. "I figure that'll get their attention. They'll probably let me keep you overnight, and by tomorrow I may just be able to buy you from them."

That wasn't exactly the way I wanted to say that, either.

There was an uncomfortable silence, then she asked me to call Paul Green. All I got was his answering machine, but I didn't want to leave a message. Maybe I was being too cautious.

"Let's go, Melanie, I think it'd be better if we were at my place. I can't do much from here."

My car started out life as an expensive 4-seat German hatchback, but there wasn't a lot of original equipment left. Now it was a coupe with a very large cargo deck and some other custom features. Melanie and Paul got the cargo deck; they wouldn't have fit in the passenger seat anyway. I took it easy on the trip home, but it was a short trip. In about ten minutes we were at the outer gates. It's an airlock type of arrangement, two gates about 40 feet apart, and they won't open at the same time. This keeps the lions from getting out, and also gives unwanted guests something else to get past.

Once through the gates, it's almost another mile to the house, but the road is straight and perfectly paved, and the lions stay off. So I kicked on the extra set of highbeams and gave Melanie a thrill. We made that last mile in a little under 30 seconds.

Just like every other time I'd come home for the last two years, I looked, and just like every other time, Linda's parking space was empty. Someday I was going to stop looking.

"Do you live here all alone?"

Nobody told me Smartcats could read minds.

"Just me and eleven lions, but they stay outside."

"It's a very big house."

Didn't she think I knew that? And she didn't know the half of it.

"Yes, well, I do a lot of entertaining. There's also a large basement." That was a favorite understatement.

"Are you married?"

Is this some natural law? Big houses imply marriage? It had to be pretty fundamental, if Smartcats knew about it, too.

"Yes. Well, no, actually, I mean, I'm still married, but we're separated."

"I'm sorry."

"Don't be, it's okay." That's what I always told myself, anyway.

I parked next to my old beat-up truck, and offered to carry Paul inside for her. To my surprise, she accepted, although I noticed she kept an eye on me as we went in.

I checked the status board by the front door, and everything was copacetic, so I punched in the day's authentication code, heard the bolts slide back, pushed open the door, and we went in.

"It is a big place. I'd better show you around, so you'll know where everything is. If you don't mind, I'll put you two up in the vet clinic." I laughed. "Well, we can't have someone dropping by and finding a couple of supposed lions snoozing in one of the guest rooms, can we?"

Just past the kitchen in the east wing was a fully-equipped

veterinary clinic, with the special equipment you needed to handle lions. On the outside wall were a pair of rooms I thought of as my maternity ward. They were designed to give the lionesses a quiet, secure place to deliver their cubs. I could also use them to isolate a sick animal. Fortunately, we had a lot more births than illnesses. Both rooms were empty at the moment, so I just unlocked the nearest one, and showed them around inside.

The floor was half concrete and half grass; harder to maintain but more flexible. There was an automatic sliding door to the outside, but I made sure it was off and locked; didn't want the real lions coming in to disturb the guests. I'd designed the sanitary facilities for lions. If you ever keep lions, you'll realize pretty quickly that Kitty Litter doesn't cut it.

Melanie seemed satisfied with the arrangements. She let me leave Paul snoozing on the grass, and I dimmed the lights and took her around for the rest of the Grand Tour.

It certainly was a big house, no doubt about it. The main floor had over 8,000 square feet of living space, about 1,000 for the lions and the rest for people. The kitchen and dining room would have worked for a small restaurant. The living room, family room, and rec rooms could handle a party of a few hundred people. There was also a large patio out back with a swimming pool.

There was only one bedroom on the main floor, and I wanted to be sure Melanie saw it. It was more like a studio apartment, actually, with an entry on the foyer and another door exiting to the west side of the house by the garage. A third, very heavy door led into a small windowless room which served as a guard house or control room for the rest of the house. There were CCTV monitors, computer consoles, radios, and telephones all over. Most of the equipment was shut down, since it had been some time since I'd had any active security problems, but I made sure it was all in good working order. One set of monitors I always kept going was fed by a set of surveillance cameras on precision az-el mounts around the roof and outer perimeter; these were programmed to find and follow anything moving on or near the estate. There were also microphones spread liberally around the area. All of this stuff was recorded on a two-week loop just in case something happened while I was away. For those situations where only natural eyes would do, a staircase, almost a ship's ladder, led up through a steel hatch to a rooftop observation post.

That was the only "upstairs" in the house. Everything else was down the big, wide stairs just to the east of the entry hall, and that's where we went next.

It was fun watching Melanie as she padded silently around the house. I'd shown the house to a lot of people, but Melanie seemed to appreciate it a lot more. It may have been the scale of the place, which was large even to human eyes, twice as high as hers.

The staircase was two meters wide, and the steps were broad and shallow. I hated steep staircases, and I had this one built to suit me. There were three landings on the way down, and we ended up eight meters below the main floor.

At the bottom, though, you got the feeling you'd descended onto a rooftop. The basement ceiling was vaulted, over five meters high at the center, a brilliant sky blue, evenly lit by cove lights around the walls of the main room. The room itself looked like a

roof garden, such as you'd find on an expensive high rise residential building. The rooms along the two long sides looked like penthouse apartments, with french doors and small private patios.

On one side, the doors led into a smaller kitchen and breakfast room, with two hallways leading back to the bedrooms. There were seven bedrooms in this area, a single enormous master bedroom suite taking up the far wall, and six merely large bedrooms along the hallways, each with a private bath and plenty of closet space.

On the other side of the main room was a businesslike set of offices, workrooms, and lab facilities. These elicited the obvious question from Melanie.

"What are these for?"

"I used to do some research here, but apart from my office, it's all closed down now."

She didn't ask what I had been researching, which was just as well.

The phone rang, and I reached over and answered it—there are phones everywhere in the house. It was the circus. Yes, now you mention it, they were missing a lioness and her cub. So I'd found them, huh? Great, they'd be right over to get her. Au contraire, I told them, they were securely caged, and I was about to go to sleep. If they wanted to send someone around at nine or ten tomorrow morning, that'd be just fine, and in the meantime they should be happy that the dangerous beasts had been captured by someone who knew how to handle lions before they tore up any citizens, you know how bad that'd be for business. Give me a call before you come over, thanks, bye.

I hung up quickly and started laughing. Melanie didn't join in, but I guess she appreciated the humor in the situation, since she didn't ask me to explain it.

She was beginning to look tired, which wasn't too surprising, considering how much she'd been through. I took her back upstairs, showed her how to use the omnipresent intercom panels to get in touch with me, and headed back downstairs to the office.

I fired up the old Sun workstation I'd been using for something like twenty years, and started poking around on the net. I was looking for information on the McNab case, and the current legal precedents for this sort of thing. I didn't really expect to find many. The legal status of Smartcats was not well settled by this time. They were smart enough not to get into trouble, except for the few who tried to leave their employers, and about all the law ever did was to return them if they were caught. Criminal laws just hadn't been applied to Smartcats yet—none had ever committed a crime.

McNab was "employer of record" for two Smartcats at the moment, Melanie and another female, presumably Melanie's replacement. He had a pretty hefty bounty out for Melanie's return, but this was fairly routine, and I didn't think he really wanted her back anyway. He was probably just going to sell her contract off.

Well, I could try to facilitate that. I sent a letter to Donna Scheer, a director of the Freedom League, and asked her to get in touch with McNab. She'd tell him that Melanie had turned herself in to their group, and offer to buy out her contract. Of course, she'd be negotiating with my money.

I also found out why Melanie had tried to protect Paul Green. He had been caught helping another escaped Smartcat a few years earlier, and a court had enjoined him from coming into any further contact with Smartcats. If he was implicated in Melanie's escape, he'd probably end up in jail.

Paul—the cub, not the man—was the real problem. Since he was born while Melanie was registered to McNab, he was also under McNab's control. I was prepared to fudge his birthdate if I could get Melanie registered to me for a few months, but if McNab found out, there could be real trouble. A Smartcat cub is both expensive and valuable. Expensive, because Paul would require intensive schooling, five or six years' worth. Valuable, because once he was done, his contract would be worth a great deal of money.

McNab could legally take him from Melanie at any time, and put him into the kind of school where he'd soon forget about his mother and learn to obey McNab, or any other employer. This struck me as a Bad Thing, and I'm sure Melanie felt the same way about it.

Well, take one thing at a time, I told myself, we'll see what happens tomorrow. And I went to sleep.

Okay, you know who I am, you know what the research lab was for. But if I don't explain why I've been avoiding the subject, you're probably going to get the wrong impression.

I'm not ashamed of the role I've played in the development of the Smartcats. Before I came along, they were pets, a little smarter than their wild cousins, capable of following simple orders, but not much more. They had no special legal status.

I gave them minds better than my own, and voices to speak with, and opposable thumbs. I'm very proud of that.

Nor do I feel guilty about getting rich off of my work. I've done a lot of different things, and most of them have been successful, but my work with the Smartcats has been more rewarding—emotionally and financially—than anything else. I think that's just fine. That's the way it's supposed to work, isn't it?

And don't read too much into the fact that I breed lions. It's just something I got started at while doing the research, and I enjoy it, so I've kept at it. It's not like I don't have any other friends.

My wife left me because I was working too hard, okay? That's all. I don't know why she won't come back now.

I sleep okay, anyhow. The phone woke me up a little before 8 o'clock, which is when my alarm clock goes off if I'm not already awake. It was the guy from the circus again. I won't even try to

repeat the conversation; I don't remember it clearly anyway, but he spent most of it dancing around his real purpose, which was to ask me how much I'd pay for their "lions". I'm sure he'd been in touch with someone, because this time around he acted like he knew who I was. More to the point, he acted like he knew how much money I had.

Compared to how much I was laying out to get Melanie's contract away from McNab (I hoped), the market price for a lioness and cub is peanuts. Still, I hate to get jerked around, just on principle, so I played with the guy for fifteen or twenty minutes before we settled on a price. I later calculated that I'd negotiated him down to within about twenty percent of breakeven on the deal— what he'd paid Green for Melanie alone, plus food and cage space since then. Considering that I got Paul in the deal, I figured I'd done pretty well. Capitalism runs in my blood.

Right after I hung up, there was a knock on the door, which I must admit surprised me a great deal. I think I was still in living-alone mode. I caught myself before grabbing my pistol and whacking the panic button, but only just. Instead, I sat up in bed, pulled the sheets around me, and punched another button to unlock the door.

"It's open," I called.

Melanie pushed the door open with a paw, and Paul ran in ahead of her. I tried calling to him, but he was more interested in exploring under the furniture.

"Good morning," I said. "I guess you found everything?"

I guess she had. She'd obviously figured out the wash stand. It wasn't easy washing a grown lion, and I had a small room by the clinic, like a very large walk-in shower stall, just for that. It was designed to be operated by human hands, but her thumbs were good enough to work the controls and hold the shower head, and the dryer nozzles worked themselves.

She was looking pretty good. Better than my lions usually did. No surprise; her lion genes were the best we could find.

"Yes, thank you. Who was that?"

"The circus. They agreed to sell you to me," I said, wishing I could find a more polite way to say that.

"Oh. I heard the phone ring, I thought it might be important."

"It was. Now we have to cut you loose from McNab. I sent a letter to a lady I know, she's going to get in touch with him for us. Probably won't hear anything before noon, though."

"Okay." I think she wanted it to move faster, but sometimes things just don't work that way.

"Why don't you go back upstairs and watch some TV or something, I'll get dressed, and we can sit around and wait."

It usually takes me a while to get going in the morning. I tried to hurry it along, but it was still most of an hour before I made it upstairs. As I suggested, Melanie had the TV on, and Paul was watching avidly. I don't really think he could understand it, but

who knows?

"Hello again. Want to try Paul again?"

She brightened up. "Yes, can I?"

"Sure, but don't speak to anyone you don't know."

Melanie had been studying the phones, I think, since she had no problem cutting in the speaker and voice dialer. Paul's number was answered by a woman, and when Melanie looked to me, I spoke up.

"Paul Green, please," I said.

"Whom shall I say is calling?"

Sounded like an office. "Joseph Cullin."

There was a pause, then a man's voice. I motioned at Melanie to wait, and asked, "Is this line secure, sir?"

Confidently, he said, "Yes."

I gave Melanie a thumbs-up.

"Paul, this is Melanie."

"Melanie? Where are you? Who was that?"

"That was Joe. He's a friend."

I liked hearing that. She continued, "I'm at his house. Paul got loose and ran away yesterday, and I had to go find him. Now I don't think we should go back. I'm afraid we'll be found out."

He didn't seem happy, but he accepted it. "If that's what you've decided. Can you trust this Cullin? I beg your pardon, sir, but I've never heard of you."

"I think you have," I said. "I breed lions now."

The man had smarts. Without hardly pausing, he figured out who I was, and why I'd said it that way, and decided to respect my privacy. He didn't elaborate, he just said, "Melanie, you can trust him."

I was beginning to wish I'd met him before.

Melanie certainly knew something more had passed between us, but she didn't ask. "Joseph has agreed to buy me from the circus," she said—it didn't sound any better with her saying it. "He's also going to try to buy my contract from McNab."

"You must have your reasons, sir," he said, "but I do not question them. I would have done that myself, if I could have."

"I understand, Paul," I said. "I was thinking of offering Melanie a job here."

I was? Where did that come from? Strange what can come out when you open your mouth. Melanie was looking at me, so I plunged on. "I just got done with a major project, and it's been

extremely profitable. I've been planning a few new ventures."

I was learning as much as they were, just listening to myself talk. Remarkable.

"I thought I'd probably need someone to handle security here at the Project," I said. "Melanie came along at the right time. She says she's done that kind of work, so it seemed like a good idea. Besides, she'll have to stay out of the regular job market while she's raising young Paul."

This didn't sound all that coherent to me, either. But what the heck, humans are notoriously fuzzy thinkers.

"Paul, have you heard from Painter?" Melanie asked.

"Yes, have you been trying to reach him? He's found a really good job. Communications and technical advisor for a film being produced in Tunisia."

"Do you have a number for him?"

He did, and he read it to us. I gave him the phone number at the house, and after a few more pleasantries, Melanie hung up the phone.

"Painter?" I asked.

"Paul's father," she replied. "Do you mind if I call him?"

Long distance charges were nothing to me since I put up my own communications satellite. Low-orbit satellites weren't as easy to use as geosynchronous satellites, but they were a lot cheaper, and there was room for a lot more of them. Mine was one of twelve satellites in a network which handled three percent of the domestic and two percent of the international calls from the US. It may not sound like a big piece of the pie, but people make lots of phone calls. So naturally I said "Sure, go ahead."

I excused myself from the room while she made the call. It seemed like the polite thing to do. I went down to the small kitchen, where I made most of my meals—closer to the office, easier to clean—and made myself some breakfast. This didn't take long, since the box of Raisin Bran was already open, and the dishes in the dishwasher were clean.

Melanie showed up a few minutes later. I didn't know what had transpired on the phone, but I could read her expression easily enough. I'd seen it many times before. She was hungry. I could have slapped myself. She'd had nothing to eat the day before. She hadn't asked, either, but she should have. Paul was with her, but of course, he never had a problem getting a hot meal.

"Oh, hey, I'm sorry, I forgot all about food last night. I don't eat regularly myself, and the lions have automatic feeders, so I just don't think about it much."

"That's all right. I told you, I usually only eat once a day."

Oh, that's right, she had. "Well, it's that time. What do you want? There's not much down here, just simple stuff, but upstairs we have everything from Lion Chow to lobster tail." That came out pretty strange, didn't it?

"Lion Chow? In your kitchen?"

"Well, no, in the vet's office," I said, laughing. "But don't you get enough of that as it is?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

"So what can I get for you? Anything you really like?"

I got the impression she didn't want to ask for anything in particular, so I sort of took over, and talked her into steak. Lions are big, but they really don't eat all that much. Four to six pounds of high-quality protein each day is plenty. Leaving the Raisin Bran behind, I took her upstairs and flashed a few of my bigger T-bones up to blood temperature, and left a smaller one under the broiler long enough to cook through.

I put hers on a big tray, and mine on a regular plate, and then realized I couldn't expect her to sit at the table. So, just to be polite, I served them both on the floor, although I only gave myself utensils. I knew she'd try to use them, and she'd be able to, but it wouldn't have been very efficient.

She had about six times as much food as I did, but she was certainly going to finish before I did. She took her time on the last steak, making it last until I was done with mine. Have you ever seen a lion eat a steak by licking it apart? You don't normally think of tongues as dangerous, do you?

Paul kept running back and forth between us. I don't think he wanted anything to do with steak, cooked or not, but he sure got a kick out of shoelaces. He was acting like a puppy or something, which probably would have been an insult if I'd actually said it. I tried tucking them into my shoes, but he could tell what I'd done. Fortunately he got tired of the game before the laces wore out.

I tossed the dishes into the sink, and we went back into the family room. Well, we weren't all fed yet. As soon as we sat down, me in my favorite chair, Melanie in front of the couch, Paul started crying and butting his head against his mother's chest. She rolled over onto her side, and he found his way back to her teats and started nursing.

I'd seen the exact same thing hundreds of times before, but now I found myself staring like some adolescent kid. I snapped out of it before Melanie noticed, thank goodness. She clearly wasn't very shy, but I didn't want her getting the wrong impression. Whatever that was.

But really, it was beautiful. Melanie had this absolutely ecstatic expression on her face. Every so often she let out a low rumble from deep in her throat. Lions can't purr, but I've never seen a happy housecat make the floor shake.

Well, I wasn't going to sit there and watch like a fool, so... I sat back, closed my eyes, and listened.

I guess I must have dozed off, because the ringing phone woke me up. It was my friend Donna from the Freedom League. She seemed upset.

"What's wrong, Dee?"

square miles, pick your favorite unit. There's a nice path along one stream which takes you from one of the larger lakes across the southern extension of the property. I have three lakes, plus streams, some nice hills, and some good-size wooded areas. It had cooled off some since the day before, and I expected rain in the afternoon, but just then the weather was perfect for walking.

I'd grabbed a belt pack on the way out—I never go far from the house without a phone, and other things—and when Paul stopped to drink from the stream, I broke out some snacks. I never remembered to prepare anything before going out, so I kept a supply of prepackaged goodies in the pack.

Pretty clearly, the chillpak fruit drinks didn't interest her, nor did the little sugar cookies. Next thing in the pack was a couple of bars of Swiss milk chocolate. Boy, did her eyes light up! You should never give chocolate to house cats. The caffeine can mess them up. But that's as may be. Smartcats love the stuff. She came right up to me and gave me the most intense look, and I began to understand how prey animals feel.

(No, my lions never did that with me, because I never fed them myself. They had automatic feeders, remember? I didn't want them ever to associate me with food, lest they start thinking of me as food.)

So here's Melanie, staring up at me with her big amber eyes, saying very politely, "I like chocolate. Could I have some, please?" and licking her chops. It was so obviously ludicrous that I decided she had to be having some fun at my expense. I clutched the candy to my chest and dropped to the ground, rolling onto my back, and tilted my head back to expose my throat.

"My life, but never my chocolate!"

Famous last words, I thought, as she leaned over, gaping, her hot breath playing over my throat. She gave this enormous growl, and then ran her tongue up the curve of my jaw. Remember that steak? She must have had another way to use her tongue, since I didn't lose any skin.

While I was trying to remember the last time I'd checked my will, she deftly extracted one of the chocolate bars from my limp hands and took a couple of steps backwards before lying down. I got a reeducation in the use of claws in place of fingers as she slit open the wrapper and folded it back neatly so she could place the bar on the ground. She ate the chocolate a square at a time, scoring and snapping off rows and then columns, impaling the squares individually on one long curving claw.

Paul came sniffing over, looking for a handout, but Melanie casually cuffed him away with her other paw. He rolled a couple of times, and by the time he got back on his feet he had already forgotten about the chocolate—or decided not to ask again, more likely. He came to me next, but I didn't offer him anything, so he just plunked down on the ground between us to wait for a change of heart.

Her chocolate was almost gone before I thought of mine, so I just hung onto it while she finished. I held it out, and said, "I thought it over. I'd rather give you my chocolate."

She smiled, and accepted graciously. She went through the same routine with the wrapper, but didn't start eating right away. Instead, she looked over at me and asked one of those questions she'd passed up before.

"What sort of research did you do in your house?"

I was asking her to place her life, and her son's life, in my hands. I couldn't lie to her, could I? So I told her about it, in great detail. It was hard, really hard. I think I had been avoiding the company of Smartcats all these years because I didn't ever want to have to explain myself to one. What could they think?

She listened attentively, respectfully, while I talked. She did finish the chocolate, but I didn't notice, and I didn't really notice when she got up to drink, or when I tabbed open the chillpaks for a drink myself. I just talked, and tried to find the right words for everything. I don't think I left out anything important, nor did I



"He wants to speak to you. McNab. He didn't listen to a word I said, he just told me to tell you to call him."

Yes, this was bad. How'd he know?

"Uh, thanks, Dee. I'll let you know what happens."

I looked over at Melanie, who was still in the same spot on the carpet, Paul napping nearby. "Do you have any idea where McNab got my name?"

"No, I don't. I haven't spoken to anyone other than Paul and Painter. I don't believe they'd have told him."

"No, of course not. Well, I'm going to call him, but I'm not going to assume he knows you're here, so don't say anything."

I did call him, but I'm not going to repeat that conversation, either, as it was quite unpleasant. He said he knew she was with me, and he was going to have me sent to jail for hiding her. I asked him how he knew, and he wouldn't say how, but I figured it out anyway, when he threatened to find out who Paul escaped from. Now, what do you suppose this meant?

It meant that Paul Green's phone was bugged, that's what it meant. Melanie had mentioned Paul, but never explicitly said he was her son. If McNab had listened to that conversation, as I'm sure he must have, he might have thought that Paul was just another Smartcat who had escaped from his employer.

I'm afraid I was rather curt in dealing with Mr. McNab. (I still didn't know what his first name was. I'm sure I must have seen it in the files the night before, but I didn't remember.) We went back and forth a few times, then I told him he had rocks in his head, and that if he took a leap from the nearest bridge, I was quite certain he would sink. I offered to help him find out if he was ever in town, too. Then, when he was in mid-expletive, I hung up on him.

Well, anyway, might as well plug the leak. I put a call through to Paul Green, said four words, and hung up. "Your phone is tapped."

Another favorite phrase of mine is "know thine enemy." So I went downstairs and spent some more time looking into Mr. McNab's records. I found out his first name: "Roger". I also found out some other interesting things. He had a record of criminal violence—three acquittals for attempted murder and one for manslaughter stood out. No convictions at all, though. He had good lawyers, I decided.

I wasn't sure which made him more dangerous—his temper, or his lawyers.

Then I found out what made him more dangerous. He was a terrorist. Oh, I know, the group he was directly affiliated was only the "political wing" of an organization which was rumored to be connected to certain terrorist activities. Crap. He was a terrorist. There's more data on the net than most people can handle, but not me. I knew which files meant something, and what they meant.

Then I got on the horn to yet another friend—well, he wasn't

really a friend, just a guy I'd met a few times, who worked for a certain three-letter agency which wasn't supposed to conduct investigations within the country. Naturally, they had all the best information on domestic terrorism. Yes, McNab was a terrorist. Was I having problems with him? Then I was in real trouble. If I needed help, his agency couldn't provide it, but they'd be happy to recommend excellent private security agencies. And of course, he'd be rooting for me. Great.

At least he knew there was no point in calling the cops. They were good for handling lost lions, but terrorism just wasn't the sort of thing that American police forces could handle. Most honest cops would tell you about those same private agencies.

I didn't think I'd need any outside help. I spent twenty-five million dollars to build this place, back in the days when twenty-five million dollars was still a lot of money. (Bad joke, I'm sorry.) Most casual visitors think the lions are a security feature. Compared to what was in place here, the lions were merely ornamental. In a real bad situation, I'd have to bring them in, so they wouldn't get chewed up by the real security systems.

And I was pretty sure that McNab was just blowing off steam. He didn't like being taken by a cat, that much was obvious, but I figured he'd cool off eventually. Trying to hasten the process along, I sent him a letter offering what I considered was a very fair price for Melanie's contract, and invited a counter-offer. Maybe money would speak louder than my big mouth.

Meanwhile, I wanted to show Melanie around again. I went back upstairs, and found them sitting inside the patio doors, watching the lions outside. The lions were out on the patio, watching Melanie and Paul.

"Time for introductions, huh?"

"Are they safe?"

I beg your pardon? Not only did she know that I lived with them, but she'd spent most of a year living with circus lions herself, and she was as big as they were, and smarter. What was she worried about? Paul, probably. Nervous mother syndrome.

"Yes, they are. I bring in other lions from time to time, there's never been a problem."

"Well, okay. Let's go, then."

And we did. It went well. As long as I'm around, the lions seem to accept anyone. There was a lot of good-natured head butting and rolling around on the ground, and I'm happy to say that Melanie and Paul and I gave as good as we got. Lions are family cats, and being accepted by a lion pride is a special kind of pleasure.

The lions had come to the house to eat, and they were evidently done already. They started moving back out, and we moved along with them. A ways out, they picked a shady spot and sprawled out to sleep. Lions sleep a lot, 12 to 20 hours a day. We left them to do some exploring.

We spent quite a while wandering around the property. I had a lot of land, about 2500 acres or a thousand hectares, roughly four

try to make myself look any better or worse than I was. That's not the way I am. I wanted to know what she thought, and if I'd been less than honest, her reactions wouldn't have meant anything. The truth is very important to me.

I don't think I ever explained it so fully to anyone else. The Project was old news for my old friends, and the people I'd met since generally didn't even know of my involvement. I remember telling Linda about it after we were married. She had been totally unimpressed. Some people were more interested, like at parties with people from some other field, like the space groupies I'd been hanging around with for the past couple years. But nobody wanted the whole story, or at least I'd never offered it before.

"I suppose I should have told you all of this up front. I wasn't really trying to hide anything. I just wanted to help, and I didn't want something I did twenty years ago to interfere."

With this, I came to an abrupt halt. Melanie looked down for a while, then spoke.

"Joseph, we all know who you are. I knew you as soon as I saw your house. I asked only because I could see it bothered you not to tell me. But as you say, it has been a very long time. You should not trouble yourself. We have our own lives now, and you aren't responsible for our problems. We're grateful for what you've given us, but we have to make our own way."

I wasn't sure what to say. After a moment, she went on.

"Thank you for helping me, though. I know you shouldn't, but I'm glad you have."

"I couldn't just stand by, Melanie."

I said that, knowing that's just what I'd been doing for years. She said nothing.

I got slowly to my feet, and noticed it was surprisingly late. I dug a watch out of the pack (I never wear one when I'm not on a schedule) and found it was already after four o'clock. No wonder I was hungry.

We took our time going back. I was unusually quiet. I guess I had a lot to think about. I carried Paul most of the way. I'm sure he wasn't used to walking so much. There was a message waiting for me, a letter from Roger McNab. He told me to stuff my offer, and offered to come over and do it for me when he came to take Melanie back. It wasn't specifically threatening, but I felt threatened nevertheless. I would have forwarded the letter to the police, but I didn't want to get them involved yet. They'd have to take McNab's side on the issue. I sent a certified copy of the message to Connie Falk, my lawyer, just as a matter of course, but I told her not to do anything about it yet.

It was still a little early for dinner, so I took Melanie for that second tour of the house I'd planned earlier. This time I made a point of showing her all the security gear, not just the stuff on the public tour.

As I've said, the house was pretty well equipped in this department. I'm not talking about fences and TV cameras, either.

The gently sloping roof concealed more than an observation post for the guardroom. There were three remote-control Long Arm sniper rifles and two .50-caliber machine guns—I had licenses for all of these—and I also had some other items which had no official existence, like a radar-aimed 30mm cannon, a pair of 81mm mortar emplacements, an old 120mm autoloading tank gun, and three piezonuclear TTS lasers. I'd tried to buy these items legally, but the government quite sensibly denied the applications because I didn't own enough land, and couldn't justify them on a self-defense basis.

Some laws, I had decided, were just meant for other people. They cost a heck of a lot of money, but I guess you remember the political situation in the mid-aughts. Civil war seemed like a distinct possibility, and if I ever had to use them, I didn't expect to have to explain myself to anyone from the government.

The other place I always skip on the public tour is the bomb shelter. Well, the basement is a bomb shelter—that vaulted roof is there for greater strength. But the real shelter is another ten meters down. It's pretty big—not like the basement, but not just a length of extra-large sewer pipe, either. There are three bedrooms, two of them like you'd see in a small apartment, and one larger room containing eight bunks.

The shelter also contained a full bathroom, a small kitchen, a rather plush sitting room, and a larger copy of the upstairs Command & Control center, which doubled as an armory. I had twenty-five ACR-4 rifles with the integral 25mm grenade launchers and five of the carbine versions, plus various cartridge-fed weapons. You never know when you'll have to equip an infantry platoon, right?

I went over all of these things very seriously. I'd been thinking about that job offer I'd mentioned to Paul Green, hiring Melanie to handle estate security, and it was looking like a real possibility. It would certainly solve her immediate problem.

Plus there was the threat from McNab, and I wanted Melanie to be able to protect herself if he showed up while I was away. She listened carefully, asked the right questions in the right places, tried out the unfamiliar sighting and aiming devices, and generally confirmed my already high opinion of her.

This was not funny business, and we were both feeling pretty solemn by the time I ran out of things to show her. We were both happy for the distraction when the phone rang. It was Paul Green again. He was calling from a public phone with a crypto unit. Smart man, as I said before. That was half the battle of getting a secure line, at least. I told him to hang on while I fired up my computer, and then gave him a toll-free overseas number. I zipped a code number into the phone he was using, but we didn't use it—since anyone listening to my line could have intercepted it.

Instead, I had him call that number. I called another, and used a pre-arranged code to sync up the crypto units in my home phone and my satellite—which was where that number I gave him went to. The code number I'd given him wouldn't help anyone now unless they were already listening to the public phone Paul had chosen, and I didn't worry about that. The satellite decrypted both calls and hooked them together as a sort of conference call. That secured my side of the link and his, and I knew the satellite

was secure.

I filled him in on what I'd learned about McNab, and he told me a few things, too. McNab had threatened him, also, and he wasn't staying at home anymore. I invited him to stay with us for a while, but he declined, saying he was too busy at work. I didn't really understand that. Different priorities, I guess.

I gave him a different number to use when calling me, so he could initiate these calls himself, and gave him the numbers for my lawyer, Donna Scheer of the AAL, and my friend of the Three Letter Agency just in case all hell broke loose at his end.

I could tell Melanie wanted to talk to him, so I went into the kitchen and fixed myself some dinner, just basic bachelor stuff. She came in about ten minutes later and let me fix her some hamburgers, warm but raw, just the way she likes them. We ate on the floor of the kitchen again. I was thinking I'd have to figure out some kind of proper furniture.

These dishes went on top of the others from that morning, and we went back into the family room. Paul was hungry again, and Melanie nursed him while we talked.

We talked for hours. Melanie told me about the circus, and I told her about space development. We talked about people we'd known—humans and Smartcats—and TV, and music, and the weather, and my lions, and the lions she'd been with at the circus, and on and on. I think we were both trying to keep it "light", to avoid talking about anything unpleasant, so we didn't get back into my research, or her time with McNab, or anything like that.

I did make a point to bring up that job offer, and she accepted conditionally, assuming we'd be able to get her loose from McNab. I decided there was no need to continue the pretense that she was a natural lion; it seemed like everyone concerned knew what was what, except for the circus people, but they were out of the picture now. I invited her to take over the upstairs apartment, and made plans to move out most of the regular furniture and install appropriate bathroom facilities. In the meantime, she could use the setup in the vet clinic.

It was getting late, and I had some office work to do, so I excused myself and went downstairs.

That's as far as the straight narrative goes. The rest of it is more like a reconstruction. I don't remember any of it myself.

I went downstairs and caught up on my correspondence. Any business generates a lot of it, and my secretary at the New York office passed along what he couldn't handle himself, mostly letters with some personal significance. It had been a couple of days since I'd read mail, and in reviewing the logs from that night, I saw that I'd read about forty letters over the course of two hours.

It was a little strange, reading my responses. I'd written them myself, of course, and they looked like the sort of things I'd write, but it was almost as if they'd been written by a twin, or a good AI. I didn't use AI's for this very reason—they could do a good job

of impersonating me, but I was never satisfied that I'd have said things the same way myself.

According to the video and audio tapes from the security system, it was about fifteen minutes after I finished reading mail that the alarms went off. The north-side video showed an Army-type Fast Attack Vehicle approaching the house from a breach in the outer fence near the front gate. The tape lasted only a few seconds before the camera went dead. The FAV had been equipped with a high-power laser which they used to wipe out the camera CCD's.

When the fence was breached, the security system went into high alert mode. A single point alarm could be the result of equipment failure, and you don't want to start the fireworks by mistake. When the cameras went dead, the system had two independent alarms, and went into action. Large sections of the roof were blown into the air by small shaped charges, and the lasers and the tank cannon were lifted up into the night air.

Still, the system wasn't programmed to take out intruders on its own. There had to be someone on the controls to authorize active countermeasures. Of course, that didn't rule out a little active persuasion.

The tank gun commenced firing as soon as it got a laser range lock. It started putting rounds into the dirt about 50 meters in front of the FAV. The driver didn't stop, but his gunner responded, and it was quite a gutsy response. We found out later that he only had two rockets. Most men would have fired the first round at the most immediate threat. This one didn't. He launched it at the east wing, hoping to take out the upstairs C&C—and presumably me.

This was a mistake two ways. First, the guard room was in the west wing—remember? I'm pretty sure I know why he made that mistake. Some years ago, shortly after the house had been built, I consented to having it featured in "Architectural Digest". I even let them mention the weapons, and showed them the guard room. It was quite out of character for them to cover such an unconventional house, and out of character for me to permit it, but they talked me into it somehow. I always wondered if someone had put them up to it.

I'd made one condition, though. I made them agree to print their photographs reversed left-for-right. It was a minor point, and they had no problem with it. I knew it wouldn't fool the agency types, but then they probably had someone on the construction crew anyway, and I wasn't too concerned about them. I just didn't want everyone in the world knowing the inside of my house as well as I did.

So that's where the gunner got his information from, I'm sure.

The other mistake was that I wasn't upstairs. I was downstairs when the shooting started. Unfortunately, I wasn't downstairs any more when that first rocket hit. I was on the stairs, on the way up. Remember where the stairs were? Right. In the east wing. Good news for the gunner, I guess, but bad news for me.

That's when I checked out for the evening, and for the next couple days. Frankly I don't mind that I don't remember what happened, because it was quite messy. At least I didn't lose anything I couldn't get replaced.

Meanwhile, Melanie didn't know what had happened to me. All she knew was that the house was under attack, I wasn't around, and someone had to do something. So she did it. She took manual control of the tank cannon, sighted in on the FAV, and pushed the button. It was just that easy.

The hard part came later. Melanie got stuck with the unpleasant task of trying to explain what happened to a bunch of very upset police officers. They took her into custody, along with Paul, bagged and tagged what was left of the FAV crew, and called in the feds to confiscate the weapons. They had to get the Army in to cart off the tank gun.

The doctors spent a day fixing my major problems, and turned me back on the next day. This was just in time for the coroner's report. The FAV driver was a known terrorist. I never found out his name. He was supposed to have been killed several years ago in a raid on a government arsenal, and the FBI didn't want to admit they'd muffed the identification.

The gunner was Roger McNab. No great surprise there, I guess. I've always wondered why he did it. I'll never find that out either, though.

Melanie didn't enjoy those two days any more than I did. The police didn't know what to do with her, so they kept her in a holding cell. Connie, my lawyer, got a judge to admit that she'd acted in defense of human life—self-defense for Smartcats had no legal precedent, as if that meant anything—and he released her in time to come see me wake up.

Well, that was pretty pleasant. She couldn't get anywhere near me because of all the tubes and wires, but I could see her standing there with Paul. I was glad they were okay.

I had another week in the hospital to look forward to, so I had my secretary moved in next door, and tried to keep up with the real world. There was a hearing that week, and Melanie was officially cleared. This was a plus and a minus. It established a precedent for self-defense by Smartcats, but it was also the first time that laws written for humans had been applied to a Smartcat. It wasn't binding on any other court, but other judges were sure to take notice, and it would probably lead to a more general application of human laws to the small Smartcat population.

McNab's hold on Melanie's contract was voided, and she became a free agent. The law still required her to have a legal guardian; I

offered, and she accepted, and the court made it official.

There was another proceeding, a much more private one, which consisted of a Federal judge, an unidentified lawyer with that old '70s blow-dried look, and me, in my hospital bed. The lawyer gave the judge a two-page legal brief, and when the judge was done, he passed it over to me. It was marked "TOP SECRET" and asked the judge to dismiss the weapons charges against me. It was signed by the President of the United States.

I didn't even vote for him. Why would he say I was running a secret government research facility? Sure, maybe he was happy McNab was out of the way. He couldn't have been that happy. I don't think the President ever saw that letter. I think someone was just saying "thanks". Nobody's come along to ask me to repay the favor, though.

Those Army guys came back and reinstalled that tank cannon and the other stuff before I even got home. It was no problem getting the house repaired. The fence had already been mended—Connie took care of that, just to keep the cops on patrol outside from getting nervous when the lions came sniffing around. Yes, the lions were okay, they weren't near the house when the balloon went up. Melanie said she'd tried to tell the cops about the lions, but they thought she meant more Smartcats. It must have been hilarious when they finally learned otherwise.

Melanie moved right in, and took her job very, very seriously. I started taking some things more seriously myself. It was hard to have much effect on the bureaucratic juggernaut in those days, and it was already headed more or less in the right direction, but I like to think that I helped the Smartcats gain a greater measure of legal equality. At least we ended the indenturement system.

Paul grew up to be a fine cat. He has a family of his own now. Melanie and Painter had several more children, although Painter never did move in with us. He's a nice person himself, but his career is more important to him than a family. Melanie never seemed to mind while the kids were growing up, and she's still satisfied with the way things are. I don't think she'll be having any more children, but who knows? She still has a long life ahead of her.

And so do I. Linda never came back, and I never remarried, but there's still time. Maybe when I'm done getting this lunar colony going, you know?

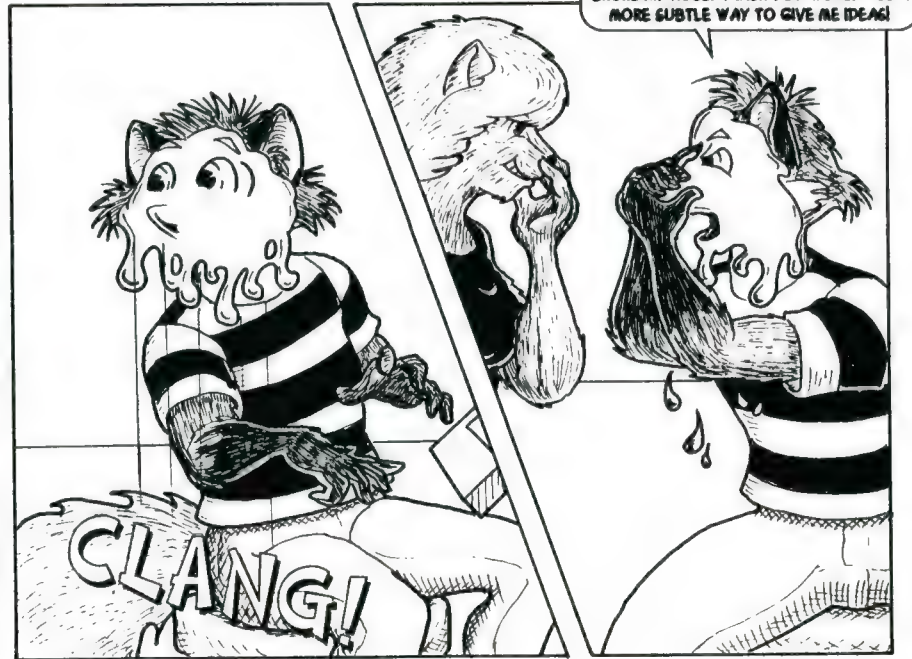
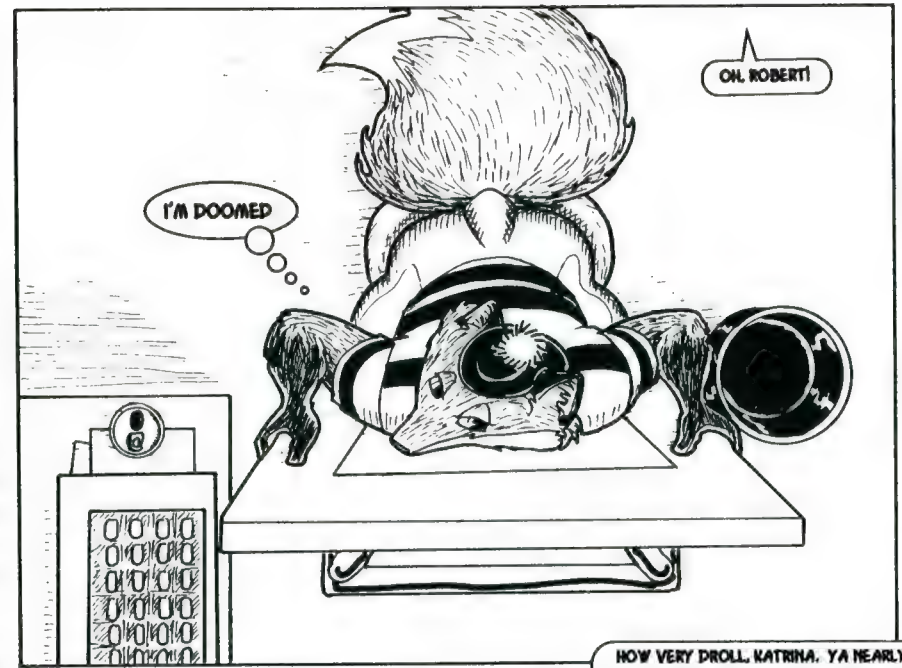
Thanks for listening. ☺



ROBERT  
AND  
KATRINA

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DEADLINE BLUES





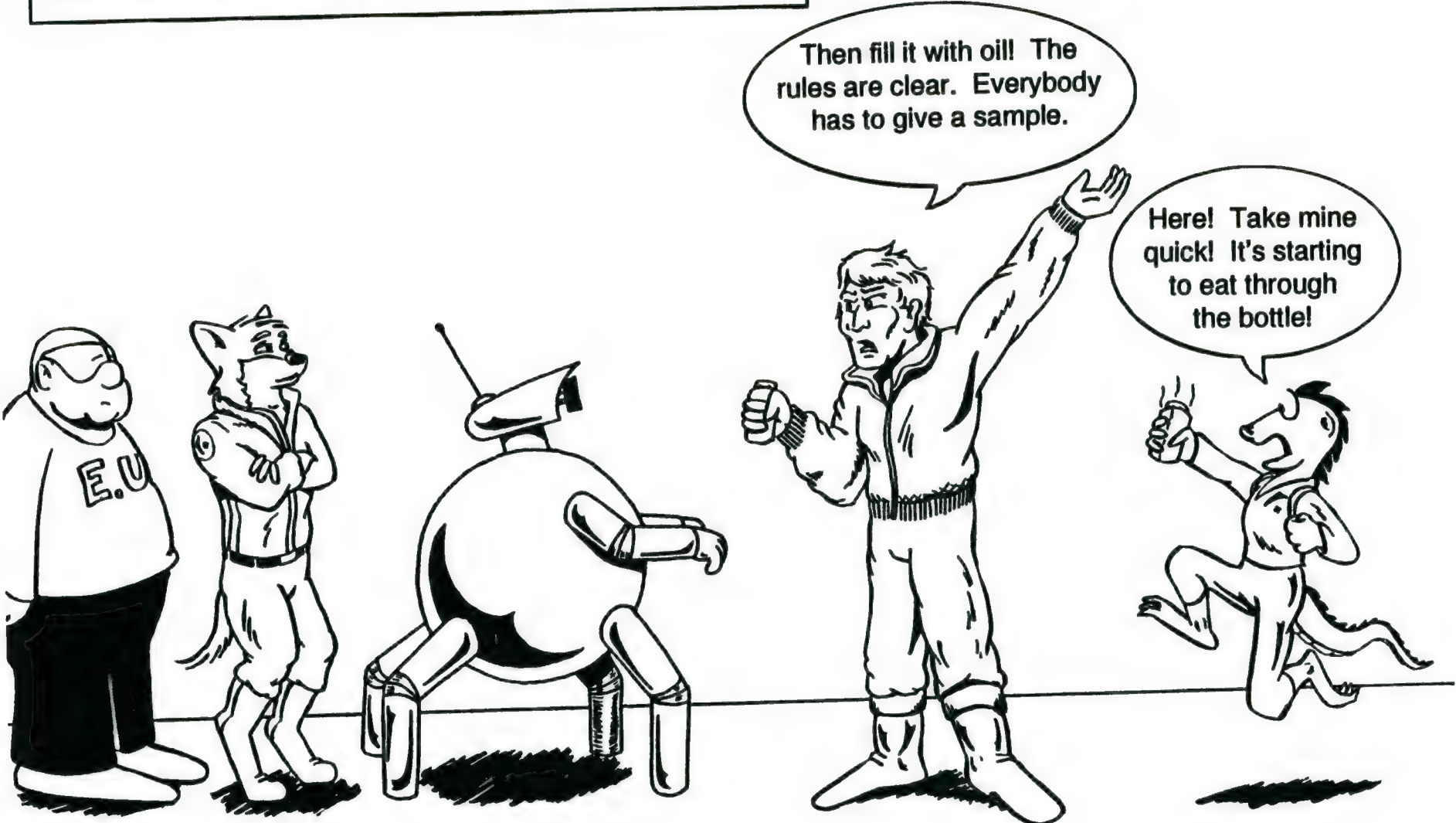
RIZZA © K. KREUTZMAN

CHRIS ©  
RIZZA  
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# DRUG FREE IN 2123



Then fill it with oil! The rules are clear. Everybody has to give a sample.

Here! Take mine quick! It's starting to eat through the bottle!



## "Swimming Lesson"

Written by Doug Durbrow  
Illustrated by Monika Livingston

"I think it's just beyond these trees," Porsha said, trying not to let her doubt show. She was leading Jonathan Redfox, son of an old family friend, through a secluded section of forest near her parents' estate.

Jonathan liked to believe that he was an adventurer at heart, but his daydreams never involved this much hiking — nor bugs.

"There sure are lots of mosquitos around here," he murmured, noticing that they seemed to flock around him, but not her.

"What?"

"Oh, I was just saying to myself how beautiful it is around here." He was barely keeping up with the young girl-fox as she forged her way through the wilderness.

Perhaps wilderness is not a proper description. This area just off the Nocturna estate was forested, but not unexplored. After all, she had obviously been here before, since she knew the way. They were headed for a small lake that had been used as a swimming hole by local residents for many years. The fact that it was secluded and hard to get to made it a favorite "get away" spot, but not too popular.

Porsha, second of the three Nocturna daughters, was the most adventurous. Her tom-boyish antics kept her mother in nervous sweats, and her father constantly searching for something "lady-like" to keep her interest. But, Porsha simply refused to fit the typical mold for young vulpine ladies, preferring to prove females are not second-best. And, since she was just about to enter her teens, the urges for independence and superiority were growing.

Now she had a chance for another conquest — outswimming Jonathan. They had only met a couple of times before, and only for brief family functions. This was the first time they had ever spent any time together unsupervised or unaccompanied. Both sets of parents would be upset if they knew about the hike to the lake, but they had been told that the kids were off for a tour of the west acreage. Young pups swimming this far from home would surely bring on a wrath of scoldings. They would have to be careful with their alibis when they returned home.

"Youch!" Jonathan yelped as a branch sprang up into his face, slapping across his nose. Did she let go of that branch on purpose, or was it just an accident?

"We're almost there!" she called back to him. She could see the light from the clearing ahead, but it didn't seem to be getting any closer. Funny, it didn't seem this far last time...

The world of the adults seemed an eternity away, as if they had been magically transported to a strange and distant land. Jonathan imagined himself thrashing through a

jungle jungle on an uncharted island. Forcing himself on, thrashing, pushing...

"Hey, watch it!" Porsha yelled as Jonathan fell forward, pushing against her back, forcing her through the brush and undergrowth. The pair spilled out of the brush, tumbling down an embankment onto the open plain. The lake was only a few feet away, lapping at the shore as if to laugh at the confused pile of fur. As they recovered, you could see the embarrassment in Jonathan's face, having been caught in a "Walter Kitty" daydream. Porsha's face conveyed agitation, having realized she was with yet another wimp of a male.

"Are you always this graceful?" she looked at him, his nose only inches from hers.

Jonathan thought carefully before answering, analyzing the question.

"No," he replied quietly. He had never liked girls, and this experience was only serving to prove his belief that they were simply not good for anything.

They untangled themselves from each other and stood up. It was indeed a magical place. Peaceful and beautiful, with the lake reflecting dancing images of the forest and mountains beyond. The call of an occasional songbird was the only thing heard above the calming sound of the gentle surf.

Jonathan didn't want to move, afraid to break the spell. He was just glad to have stopped marching through the trees and brush. While he was quietly panting to himself, he realized that he hadn't questioned Porsha's suggestion for a hike to the lake. It did seem odd though, that they hadn't brought along any fishing poles...

"Well, shall we go for a swim?" she asked as she began untying the lace on her shirt. The question was rhetorical, since that's why she had dragged them there anyway.

"Swim?!" he gulped hard, the reason for the hike to this particular spot now becoming clear.

"Yeah, swim. You do know how to swim, don't you?"

"W-Well I-I. . ." Jonathan didn't know whether to scream or run. How embarrassing to have it known that you never learned to swim, despite the fact that your family's perfume business was located in a seaport town, only a twenty minute's walk from the shore. He had explored many of the ships that docked in town, and had made friends with many members of the crews. He had climbed all over his Uncle Augustus' three masted sailing ship like a spider searching for a place to spin a web. He loved the sea, but had never learned to swim.

She was just about to pull off her shirt, and stopped in mid-motion. She looked at Jonathan and a smile crept onto her face, like the sun emerging from behind a cloud.

"You mean you . . ."

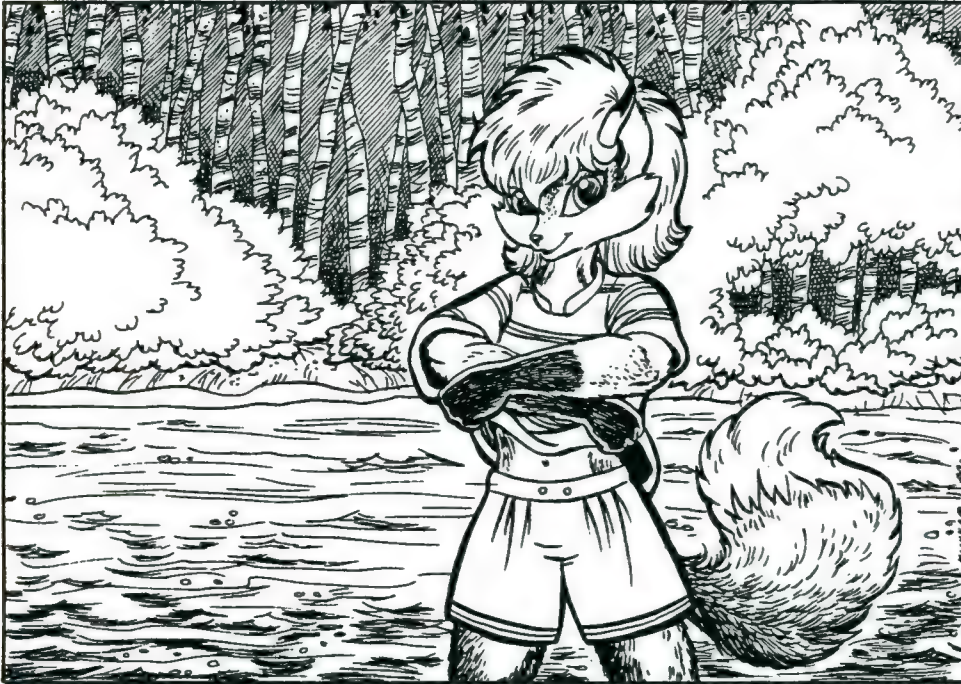
"Well I just never . . . had the time!" he interrupted, justifying his lack of skills.

"Ooooh," her smile widened, "I guess I'll just have to show you how."

"But . . . but we told our parents that we were just going out to look around. And besides, neither of us brought swimming suits!" He was desperately grasping for excuses.

"Who needs suits? No one can see us, and we're like brother and sister." She got that dare you look in her eyes. "Are you afraid?"

Jonathan did not consider them to be the brother-sister type, even though he wasn't sure what that was. They



were both about the same age, and the two families have been friendly for many years, but he still felt uncomfortable at the thought of taking of his clothes in front of anybody, let alone a girl!

"No, I'm not afraid, but what if somebody comes along and sees us?" He lied. He was afraid, terrified actually, and strangely excited about the concept of furry-dipping, and splashing around in the nude with a female.

"Does it look like someone's going to come around here?" She went ahead and pulled her shirt up over her head and down her arms, letting it fall to the ground.

Jonathan stared. If his jaw could unhinge, like his friend Snarker Mosely, it would have slammed into the dirt. She started to twist the buttons on her pant-skirt. He started feeling unusually warm, as if he had just swallowed a vat of boiling oil.

"Well, are you going to just stand there like a dummy, or are you going to join me?" She flicked the last of the buttons and the garment fell to ground. She back-stepped out of the pile of clothes and strolled towards the water.

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He gulped. Hard. He started fumbling with his clothes, trying to undo everything all at once. He was shaking with nervous excitement, while constantly searching the trees surrounding the lake. Any moment now, somebody would come storming out of the brush, yelling and pointing an accusing finger at him! His only chance was to get into the water as fast as he could. He would be safe there.

Wait a minute. Safe? In the water? With her? He knew that nightmares of this moment would haunt him the rest of his life. This was horrible! Maybe he should just run away. Yeah. That's it! Run!

Jonathan took a step forward, forgetting that his pants were at this time bundled up around his ankles.

"Aackk!" escaped his lips as he fell, one hand reaching for his pants, the other reaching out to break his fall.

He landed in a crumpled heap of fur and clothes, face and pride in the dirt.

"Are you coming in or not?" Porsha had waded in, with water up to her chest. She turned to face the shore to see Jonathan. What she saw made her laugh out loud. She tried to quiet the laugh with her hand, but it was too late. She was sure that he had heard.

He grumbled to himself, as he regained his composure. Now he was just getting angry. Angry that he was clumsy enough to trip over his own pants, angry that he was stupid enough to let a female trick him into going swimming. Standing up, he quickly shed the rest of his clothes, his shirt being the last piece. As the shirt cleared his head and dropped to the ground, he looked up towards Porsha, who had waded closer

into shore. Anger turned to burning embarrassment when he saw that she was staring at him!

"Well, well! I guess I'll call you 'Little' Johnny Redfox from now on!" She grinned broadly.

"Why you . . ." Jonathan lunged towards her hands reaching out as if to strangle her, splashing into the water. She was still a few feet beyond his reach, and back-paddling quickly, so he lunged again, pushing off from the bottom with the power in his legs. His jump was good, but he still fell short of his target, mostly head first, into the water, which was much deeper than he expected. Now he knew how a rock felt when it was thrown into the ocean and falling through the water. Helpless. Not to mention wet, cold and alone. He decided to do what any brave adventurer would do in the same situation.

Panic.

Not that panic was the only choice, just the best. Particularly since he couldn't tell which way was up. He started flapping his arms and legs in an uncoordinated random frenzy, trying to move in a direction. Any direction. When

it looked like he wasn't getting anywhere, he paused for a moment, then cocked his head in a different direction, and tried to flap in that direction. He realized he was getting tired, and tried to take a breath.

He was successful only in taking water.

"How embarrassing!" he thought, "to drown helplessly, pitifully, naked, wet, and in front of a girl! Why in the moon did I let her . . . GAGKK!"

Porsha pulled him through the surface by the scruff of the neck with one hand, while she slipped the other hand around his back to support him. That action brought Jonathan up to her, muzzle-to-muzzle, with him spitting, sputtering and coughing in her face. It also brought his body into contact with her as she paddled her legs to keep them afloat. Both of them had their eyes closed, but as Jonathan's flapping frenzy slowly subsided, she cracked open an eyelid to see the situation. By the time he had completely stopped flailing his arms and collapsed in hers, she had both eyes open, staring at this pitiful lump of wet fur. She kept his head afloat with her forearm as she gently paddled them into shore. His coughing was now just wet whimpering, and his eyes were starting to slowly open as they touched on the shore.

She struggled to get him out of the water, and although he tried, he wasn't much help. They lay on the beach, with light waves splashing partway up their legs, catching their breath. Jonathan shook his head as he became fully conscience again, and aware of what happened. Looking into her eyes, he coughed.

Then he said "I-I'm sorry . . . I guess I got carried away."

"That's all right, I shouldn't have teased you like that. Are you OK now?" she was more gentle-toned than usual, genuinely concerned.

Jonathan nodded, and as he did, looked down between them and remembered that they were still naked. He scooted backwards a few steps, much like a drunken crab.

"Don't worry, silly! I won't bite!" Porsha was surprised and amused. She smiled at this poor, frightened image of a male. Perhaps she was taking things too fast.

"How 'bout we try it again, a little slower?" she smiled and held out her hand. She could be quite mature for her age, at times, impatient to be respected as an adult. But, then there were other times, when it seemed that she wanted to stay a child forever.

"OK, I'll try one more time." Jonathan eased back in her direction.

Soon they were waist-deep in water, with Porsha trying to explain the basics to Jonathan, much like her mother had taught her. Over the next few hours, they took turns swimming while the other watched, pausing once in a while to rest on the shore.

"Oooh! The sun is getting low! We better get back to the house before our parents realize we're still out!" She

splashed onto the shore, and shook her fur vigorously.

Jonathan paused on shore for a moment, thinking of the day's events. He looked out across the lake, and a new feeling stirred in him. It was different now, water would never hold the same fear for him as it had up until now. He felt proud to know that he was no longer completely helpless, although it would require a few more lessons before he would be fully trained. Maybe some of the sailors at the docks near his house could give him some pointers. But, if it was ever known that he was first taught by a girl...

"Are we going to tell our parents that we went swimming?" he asked, cringing at the thought that word would get out and he'd be branded a fool, or worse.

"Are you kidding? My mother would kill me if she knew about this! This will have to remain a secret between just you and me."

Inside, his heart was grinning wide! His reputation was safe, as long as Porsha feared retribution from her parents. If he was ever asked, he'd say he learned to swim from some old sea dog. It never occurred to him that future mates might ask him why he paddled like a female.

They headed back, and arrived just as the sun dipped behind the foothills. A small scolding from the parents about staying out alone all day, was taken with the expected sorrowful look on the two, with apologies aptly returned.

Porsha and Jonathan saw each other at only a few other family get-togethers, and although they continued to tease each other, there would forever be a special bond between them. A bond of innocence and shared secrets. A bond of children growing towards adulthood together. A bond of water.

(Watch for the further adventures of Jonathan & Porsha in the upcoming book "Rufus The Red", later this year!) ☺



Susan the Hat Productions Present:

# WHAT THE Q# !?!

## IS GOING ON HERE?

Vancel's Vixens  
© Susan Van Camp

time warp → ~~1990~~ 1990



Well, Watson, it went something like this...

Some writers can compose entire plots in their heads before committing them to paper. Others have to muddle through one draft after another before they get it right.

Unfortunately, I'm a muddler. I spent months developing and discarding plots before I came up with the one I used in the upcoming Vancel's Vixens mini-series (plug, plug).

What follows is a plotline I abandoned after completing twelve pages. Eleven



Five The first ~~page~~ page segment will be in this issue, and the second next issue.



After that the story ends. Abruptly! I did a little editing...



# CHOP!



Well, you get the idea. Needless to say, this plotline bears little resemblance with the one I used in the miniseries.



I'm open to suggestions as to what I can do with this storyline. Some thoughts have occurred:

A. Blow it up?

You Betcha!



B. Continue it as an alternate universe?

Yeah! We'll call it Vancel's Vixens and the large chested Bimbos from hell!



C. something else that hasn't occurred (as long as it's Not Obscene!) let me, Kawaii! Susan Van Camp 1418 Cancy Flint MI 48503.



THE YEAR WAS 903 DOMINION (3,697 A.D. NAPE RECKONING): A ROTTEN YEAR FOR INDEPENDENT TRADERS.



IN 903, INDEPENDENTS WERE CUT OFF FROM SAFE, RICH TRADE ROUTES BY BIG CORPORATE TRADERS. NOTHING WAS LEFT TO THEM BUT THE OUTWORLDS.



OUTWORLD TRADING WAS RISKY. IT HAD BEEN SO SINCE THE WAR BETWEEN MAL (WHO HAD FUR) AND SAURIANS (WHO DID NOT). BY 903, THE WAR HAD ENDED, BUT THE RISKS REMAINED.



INDEPENDENTS TOOK THEIR CHANCES. THEY WERE BRAVE, OBSTINATE AND FOOLISH; OTHERWISE, THEY WOULDN'T HAVE BEEN INDEPENDENTS.

THEY TRAVELED THE OUTWORLD TRADE ROUTES WITH THAT MIXTURE OF ANXIETY AND INDIFFERENCE COMMON TO SOLDIERS AND MERCHANTS EVERYWHERE...



UNTIL THE RISKS CHOSE TO MAKE THEMSELVES KNOWN.



INDEPENDENTS  
LIVED IN TERROR  
OF SAURIAN  
RAIDERS, AND FOR  
GOOD REASON.



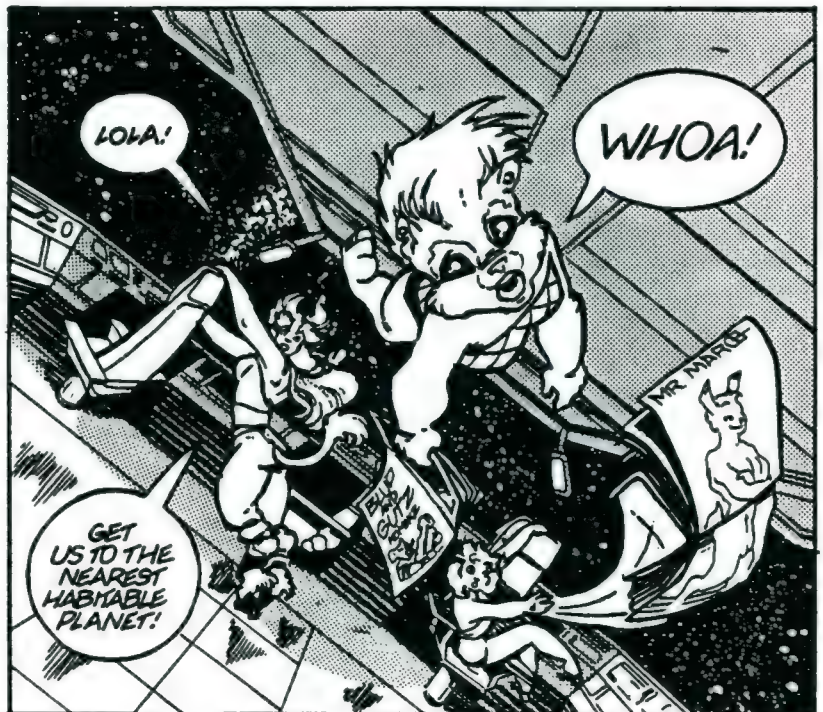
IT ONLY TOOK A  
LITTLE SAURIAN  
MAGIC TO MUCK UP  
MAL TECHNOLOGY.



HEY! GET YOUR PAWS  
OFF THE GUIDANCE  
SYSTEM!



BAD  
MAGIC,  
CHEIF.



LOLA!

WHOA!

GET  
US TO THE  
NEAREST  
HABITABLE  
PLANET!

2)



WE'LL HAVE TO TAKE OUR CHANCES.

THE CLOSEST PLANET IS SAURIAN!



ARE THERE ANY CITIES ON THIS DIRTBALL?



I READ ONE ON THE NIGHTSIDE.

BRING US DOWN AS CLOSE TO IT AS YOU CAN.



AND IN ONE PIECE.

YOU DON'T ASK FOR MUCH DO YOU?



3

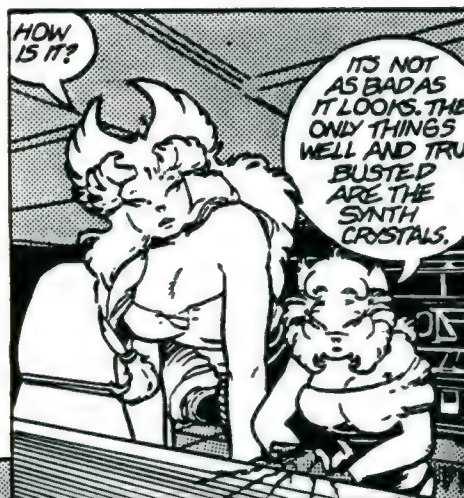


L'MING? ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?

I'M FINE! HOW ARE YOU?

THERE'S NOTHING WRONG WITH ME A LITTLE DEBAUCHERY COULDN'T CURE.

TOO BAD WE CAN'T SAY THE SAME FOR THE GUIDANCE SYSTEM.



HOW IS IT?

IT'S NOT AS BAD AS IT LOOKS. THE ONLY THINGS WELL AND TRULY BUSTED ARE THE SYNTH CRYSTALS.



THE SYSTEM HAD TEN CRYSTALS, BUT MOST OF THOSE WERE REDUNDANT. I COULD PATCH IT UP WITH ONE CRYSTAL.



IF I HAD ONE WHOLE CRYSTAL.



I'LL GET YOU A SYNTH CRYSTAL.

BE SERIOUS WE'RE PARSECS FROM THE NEAREST PROCESSOR.

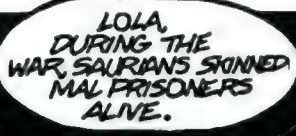
I READ THREE CRYSTALS IN THE VICINITY OF THAT SAURIAN CITY.



WHERE WOULD SAURIANS GET SYNTH CRYSTALS?

THEY STOLE THEM FROM US. L'MING! COME HELP READY THE FLYERS.

4



Final report from the U.S.  
Geological service rates this tremor  
at 7.1 magnitude, which is considered  
small.





....OKAY STUDENTS;  
NOW, WHAT I  
JUST TOOK OFF  
WAS A 390A  
LOW ALTITUDE  
FLIGHT-VEST...  
...NEXT, I WILL  
DEMONSTRATE  
THE REMOVAL OF  
A PAIR OF V130  
ALL PURPOSE  
FLIGHT-PANTS...

FLUMP!

FITTS-HOWELL



Song: 'When a Bunny Meets a Bunny  
Comin' through the Straw.'  
(How it is not meant to be sung)  
Bunny and the East Finchley rugby team.



# YARF!



STANLEY 89

Defining the State of the Art for  
Applied Anthropomorphics