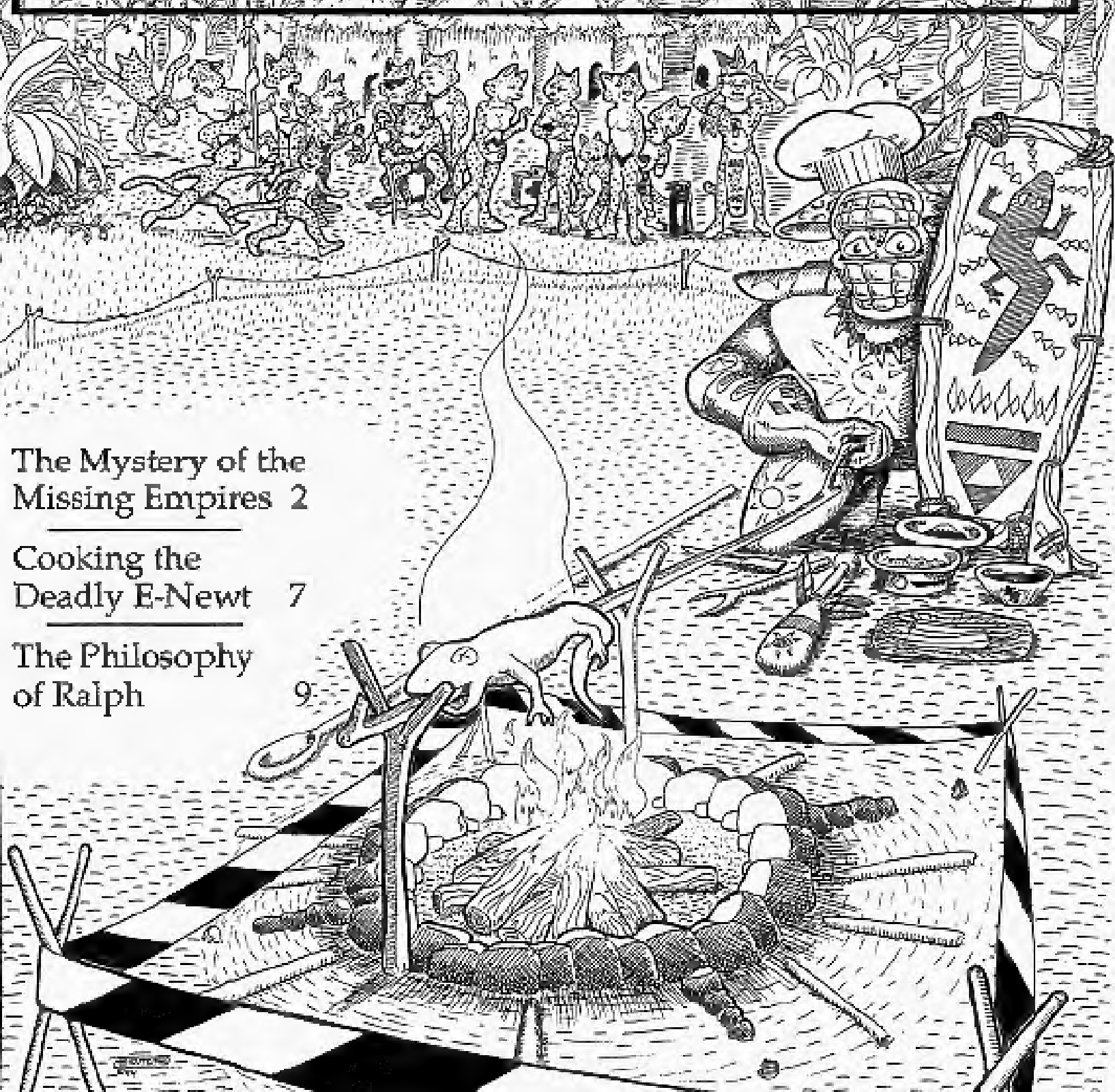


Issue Thirty-Three

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YARF!

THE JOURNAL OF APPLIED ANTHROPOMORPHICS

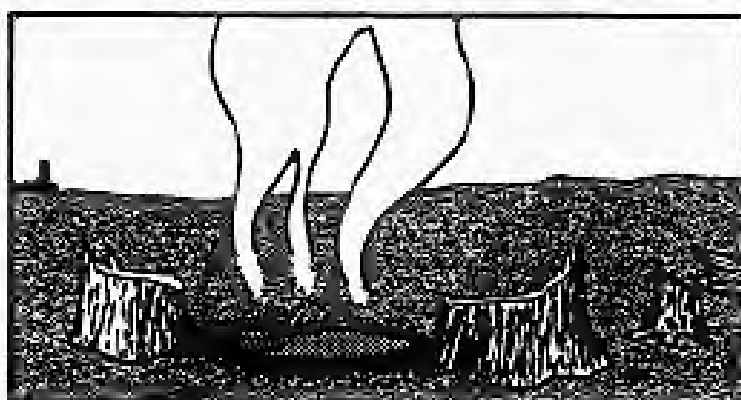
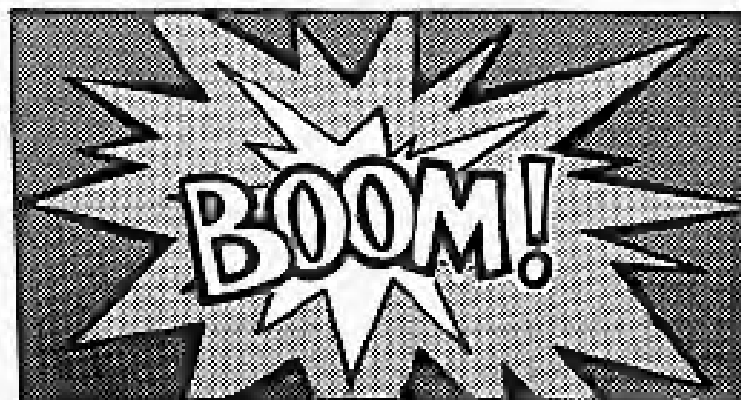
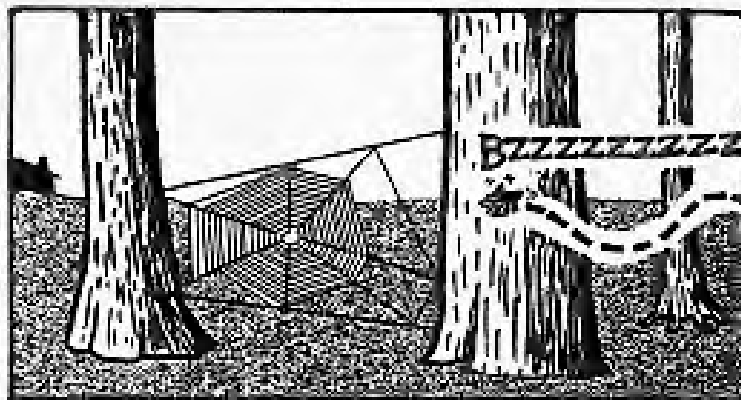


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YARF!

THE • JOURNAL • OF • APPLIED • ANTHROPOMORPHICS

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COMING SOON...

•• Our Fifth Anniversary Issue! ••
Act of Spades returns
TKI&I • David Green & Conrad Wong
Changes • Gerald Perkins & Brian Harp
...And More Neat Stuff than
You Can Shake a Stick At!

FLAMING HAIRBALLS

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



Welcome to our holiday issue! This time we're featuring, in addition to the usual seasonal material, lots of explosions and fragments. Why? It seemed like a good idea at the time....

Oddly enough, though, *Yarf!*'s largest contributor of explosions, *Ace of Spades*, is on hiatus for this issue. It will return next issue, when Sarge Grant will start the buildup to an appropriately explosive finale.

Speaking of next issue... we celebrate our fifth anniversary with a wide variety of new talent and old friends. It's hard to believe we've come this far. We couldn't have done it without you.

Least-wanted gift department: Direct to all US citizens from the board of governors of the US Postal Service — a rate increase! Yes, starting 1 January 1995, US postal rates will be going up about ten to fifteen percent across the board. What does this mean for you...?

Well, we're not sure yet because, in true holiday fashion, they're keeping mum about specifics regarding most classes of mail. However, at this writing, it seems certain that we will be forced to raise our cover price and subscription rates for the first time in three years.

As long as we're on the subject, please please please keep us up to date with your current address! We're having a hard time keeping up with some of you jet-setters. (You know who you are.) And let us know if the post office has been processing your issues through their mangling machines or routing them to their black hole substation so

that we can politely ask them to forego these services.

And now the topic you've all been waiting for — Conference Six, 13–15 January 1995 in Irvine, California. We'll be there, of course — there's no helping it! We hope to have, in addition to our usual selection of fine products, the *Yarf! Anthropomorphic Bibliography* and *Yarf! The First Five Years*.

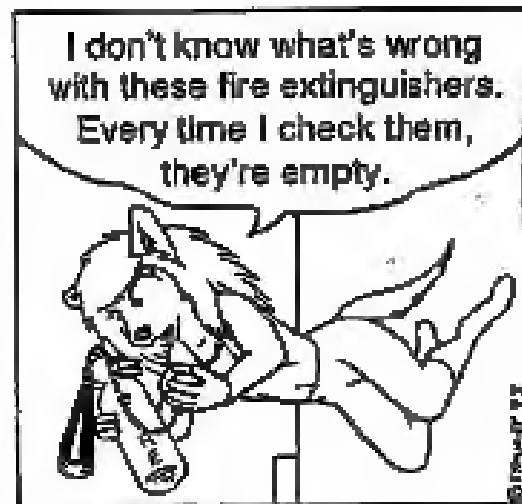
The *Bibliography*, compiled by Fred Patten, will include more than two hundred listings, most with brief descriptions and some with illustrations. The artists include both regular contributors and newcomers to *Yarf!*'s pages.

Yarf! The First Five Years is an index of the first thirty-three issues. We plan to list every contributor, and every contribution, that appeared in these issues by title and by creator(s). This comprehensive tome has grown out of a personal project begun by *Yarf!* contributor Gerald Perkins, who deserves much credit for his initial work.

Our first letter is from Matt J. McCullar of Arlington, Texas, and says it at least as well as we could:

I grew up as a furry fan, without really knowing that such a thing existed. I just enjoyed animated classics such as the Pink Panther and the Warner Brothers 'toons. I still own most of my old Richard Scarry books. (God keep you, Dick.) I was too young to appreciate the animated *Star Trek* during its initial run, but discovered Lt. M'Ress years later in the Trimble *Concordance* and the Foster Log novels. I still prize my autographed books by George Selden, William Steig, and C.J. Cherryh. But I probably

Freefall by Mark Stanley



would never have spotted Steve Gallacci's *Albedo* at a con during the late '80s. That was the spark, and it's been a slow burn ever since.

I learned about Martin Wagner's *Hepcats* in an unusual manner: my brother, a cartoonist at Texas A&M at the time, had several copies of Martin's strip from the *Daily Texan* pasted in his own scrapbook. (By the way: for some reason unknown to me, Martin has yet to point out that there is a secret message that can still be seen in *Yo and The Collegiate Hepcats*. It was part of a campus promotion and is good clean fun. It involves ten consecutive strips during the sequence in which Steve and Jasper go fishing. Work backward to spell out the message. After that, you're on your own, folks.)

By now I'm pleased to learn that furry artwork and stories based on anthropomorphic characters is more popular than I thought. I've gotten to correspond with a number of folks, if not through the mail, then via modem. And that brings me to the real point of this letter.

I am disheartened to find that more than a few folks have given up the fandom altogether. One or two had no choice, I know, due to financial reasons or other emergencies. But most are leaving due to politics and hurt feelings. I must comment on this, because I hate to see talent go to waste.

Feelings are always going to get hurt whenever any organization grows beyond a certain size. This is why cliques form in schools, sects branch off from churches, and revolutions get started. You can't please everybody. But it is always easier to find fault with something than it is to praise it. Stan Lynde, in his book *Rick O'Shay, Hipshot, and Me*, says that when he first got into the comic strip business, his editor gave him some very good advice: "When you get a *positive* letter, count it as ten or twenty. Because at least that many people felt the same way, but didn't write. But when you get a *negative* letter, count it as one, because nearly everyone who has a complaint writes." And any newspaper editor will tell you how dependable polls are, because all you have to do to find out how popular any comic strip is — quit running it.

"What's the point of spending all these long hours working on my art and stories if it gives me nothing but grief?" some may ask. Well, the point is that some folks out there *do* appreciate it. There may not be very many, but they love every word, every brushstroke, everything you have to say. They just don't make much noise about it. They buy it, read it, soak it in, and wait for more. Gene Siskel was once asked why he watches so many movies if they're all so crummy. "Just give me one good one," he answered.

So this letter is to everyone out there in furry fandom: those who have come and gone, those who do this for a living, those who are just fans, and those who hope to do this sort of thing. *Don't let the bastards get you down!* Do

it because it's fun, it's good practice, and someone out there appreciates it. Who knows, you just might even hear from him or her. If you've dropped out, remember that your work lives on and someone new will discover it and wonder why you quit. Try it again, just once more.

Again, you can't please everyone. You shouldn't even try to please everyone. But if you've got a gripe, a legitimate gripe, about someone's work, imagine how you would want to learn about it. Make your point constructive, make it useful. Make the artist or writer at least listen to what you have to say, and want to try it out and learn from it and do that much better. That way everyone benefits. I would much rather read a letter that said, "Your line work could be more exciting with a quill pen." instead of, "Don't take this personally, but your work sucks."

It's supposed to be fun.

[What else can we say but, "Amen!" — Ed.]

From Gerald Perkins of San Jose, California:

I received *Yarf!* #31 & 21 last Tuesday. They arrived in pretty good condition. In fact, they seem to have survived the rigors of fourth class mail until the one person in the Post Office station who thinks my mailbox has more room on the inside than the outside got hold of them.

I like the cover on Issue 31. It's refreshingly different. I'm glad to see you experimenting and encouraging artists to be different. I'm amused to see that Sky worked his little variation on the ankh into the picture.

I'm also glad to see you encouraging new, different, and improving writers. So what are you going to do with Jason and Rick? It would be quite interesting to see how fur fandom fares down under. I'll guarantee it's not all "apples"; more likely a bit of a bludge, but it's that way here, too.

Ya knew, Robert and Katrina come off about fifty-fifty in their ongoing loving battle. Maybe Rizza should go home?

Nice to see Foxfire wearing clothes.

Ace of Spades — Oh, my. I am most impressed by Zjonni's work on this installment. I really like Sierra's patterns and Tomac's lynx look. He still has trouble with human faces, but I am told, that is the most difficult thing any artist has to learn and he is improving. I am surprised at how well the halftones reproduced. I didn't think ordinary xerography could handle them. That night launch....

[Ordinary xerography can't. But we don't use ordinary xerography; Yarf! is produced on a Xerox Docutech, the state of the art in digital reproduction. It scans images at 1200 dots per inch and, in effect, prints them as halftones. Also, since washes are difficult to reproduce properly, Zjonni wisely had stats made of the original art-

work — something we suggest to all artists using washes or creating similar grey-tone art. — Ed.]

I knew from the start that Dartan would become a priest. To what and of what kind was the question. Mr. Green's writing is still a little rough; I stumbled here and there. On the other hand, I've seen far worse on the book stands. I liked it very much that Dartan grew, learned and accepted responsibility, and looked forward to a positive future. He caught me by surprise when Ekhal turned out to be a priest of a treacherous and bloody god. Nice. This is one of those stories where theriomorphism is not required; ordinary humans would do quite well for all the characters. But if fur gets Mr. Green writing, then let there be fur.

Yes, Ralph, the Wonder Hamster, is insane. Isn't it fun?

I find myself enjoying Phil Bolton's stylized ladies. I'm not sure why, since I generally do not care for the *anime* style that has obviously influenced him. I guess quality will out.

I had the privilege of seeing the very early versions of the first two Chelisse stories. [Phil Bolton] has grown markedly since then. Chelisse's technical problem-solving, the milieu in which she lives, and the physical adventure involved in them remind me of late *Astounding*, early *Analog* writing. (Do I date myself? Well, yes, but I'm a cheap date.) My one problem so far is that I still don't have a good idea of what Chelisse and Lorenz look like. I think Chelisse is a mix on a weasel base, not very large by human standards, can go on all fours or bipedally, and generally wears only her own fur. Lorenz seems to be based on a tabby cat. Now I know he can work in a better description of them — without the old mirror trick. By the way, his use of the mirror in "Puttin' on the Ritz" was well done. Mr. Payne does something well that many other writers forget: he appeals to more than one sense. Poul Anderson admonishes to try to use at least three senses in any major scene. It makes the scene more real.

I like Tracy Wagner's piece on page 45. No glamor, no fight, just a nonhuman cooling off with a not-quite-dog waiting.

I'll reserve comment on "People of Fur". I liked *Buffalo Wings* when it was running.

I was quite certain that Watts Martin would bring up the legal question of whether or not Tara was human. I felt the court scene was a tad clumsy, but this isn't a big criminal law court, so I suppose the judge has a lot more leeway. I did like the way he questioned Tara. What I continue to admire in Watts' writing is his ability to make Tara clearly a reasoning being, but just that hair off-center that says, "This is not a human being as you know it." Very, very nice. I'm looking forward to the conclusion of the story with eagerness.

Shell's sad kitten is pure Shell, but a pleasant change

to his super body-builder characters.

Ooh, I hope that pumpkin on the cover of #32 is full of kibble and doggy treats! (I can't feature a werewolf digging into pie filling. And sweets are really bad for a canine's teeth.) Nice going, Monika.

Roz Gibson likes protest songs, doesn't she? Does them well, too. I'd like to see what she could do with a happy song sometime.

I like Lisa Iannaco's dancing Scottish foxes. So does a friend who does that kind of dancing as a hobby.

Glad to see another piece by Tony Waters. His style is refreshingly different.

Nitrocon is back. OK. I still don't have a clue as to what's going on. Maybe it's the hiatus between installments.

I got a real chuckle out of both "The Wagner Sisters Watch *Lois and Clark*" and "One-Page Gag".

Ace of Spades — Here comes the beginning of the end. Why do I have the feeling no one lives happily ever after? Maybe because I remember some of my history classes. Chris Grant has a good feel for the gritty side of war.

I believe the way Christine Hanson's canine hunter's legs work. It's a good, dynamic piece of art.

From Dean Johnson of Fremont, California:

I enjoy reading *Yarf!* and love contributing, too. I want to thank the masterminds who developed it and the fans and subscribers making it popular and strong. Because of *Yarf!*, I've been learning new things and adding new techniques and styles to simplify drawing.

Artists' art that intrigues me: Monika Livingstone's art always leaves me in awe. Jim Groat — "Have we met before?" I grew up with mischievous friends like you. Your stories are really funny. Jim Hayden is talented enough to do commission work. Brian Harp is totally natural and also very talented. Jack Cavanaugh is a deer expert. Roz Gibson is as skilled as she is intelligent. Chris Grant has me glued to his story. Keep on inking, you all. ♣

Deadlines (Ad infinitum...)

Remember, the deadlines listed are *not* written in stone, and are subject to change without notice. (A good rule of thumb to remember is that deadlines for upcoming issues are the last day of every even-numbered month.) *Yarf!* is, after all, a hobby, not a professional publication — the staff has real lives that occasionally interfere. We *do* encourage people to do this at home....

#35: 28 February 1995

#38: 31 August 1995

#36: 30 April 1995

#39: 31 October 1995

#37: 30 June 1995

#40: 31 December 1995

Patten's Pontifications

by Fred Patten

A *Night in the Lonesome October*, by Roger Zelazny. Illustrated by Gahan Wilson. New York, William Morrow/AvoNova, (hc) August 1993, 280 pages, \$18.00; ISBN 0-688-12308-5; (pb) September 1994, 280 pages, \$4.99; ISBN 0-380-77141-1.

I like Gahan Wilson's cartoons. But I think that he was the wrong choice to illustrate this pseudo-1930s horror-mystery-comedy. Roger Zelazny implies in his wry dedication that his goal is to evoke the spirits of *Weird Tales* at its classic Lovecraftian heights, blended with the fog-shrouded England shown in those famous horror movies that introduced the Vampiro, the Monster, and the Wolfman. Illustrations, slightly exaggerated, in the realistic pen-and-ink style of *The Strand* and similar popular fiction magazines of the 1890s, and of the 1930s horror-pulp illustrators, would have been more appropriate than Wilson's ghostly-giggly squiggly cartoons.

On the other paw, Wilson's reputation instantly identifies a book as delivering a particular kind of dark-horror humor. In that sense he was the best possible choice, for that is exactly the mood of *A Night in the Lonesome October*.

This whodunit thriller takes place during an October of an unnamed late-Victorian year. There are thirty-one chapters, one for each day. A group is gathering in London and the nearby countryside to play a deadly supernatural game, upon which the fate of the world rests. This is not a contest between Good and Evil. The whole cast might be considered evil; but, for their own reasons, some of these players want to save the world while the others want to destroy it. Some names are slightly disguised, but the reader will recognize the Serial Killer, the Vampire, the Witch, the Graverobbers, the Mad Russian Monk, the Druid Priest, the Scientist with his Monster, the Clergyman Turned Demon-Worshipper, and others — not to mention the Great Detective, who is investigating this secret meeting of unusually suspicious characters.

But only half of the players are humans. Each has a talking-animal familiar, and it is through the cast of familiars that the mystery is related. The narrator is Snuff, the hound who is the partner of the Ripper. Others are Graynalk, the cat; Nightwind, the owl; Needle, the bat; Cheeter, the squirrel; Quicklime, the snake; and

more. Like the humans, each of the animals must figure out who is to be trusted, what information is reliable, which clues are real and which are setups for deadly traps. It can be as fatal to reject a genuine offer of friendship as to be overly naïve. Stupid animals do not survive in this game, so most of these familiars are adept at clever dialogue loaded with cynical double meanings and subtle misdirection. The players must also take each others' physical attributes into consideration in planning useful alliances. Snuff has a good nose and strong jaws, while the avian familiars can get a good view of the entire countryside, and Quicklime or Bubo the rat can investigate small, enclosed places. Some of the animals also have supernatural powers of their own, which may or may not be obvious.

This is about all that can be said without spoiling part of the creepy puzzle. Zelazny is a master at starting out with situations that are intriguing enough to hook the reader even though they are bewilderingly mysterious, and are only gradually revealed. However, it is immediately clear that this is the animals' tale. The focus is upon them. The human players are seen through their eyes. Also, the familiars are not mere pets. Each has a strong individuality, and some are loyal to their human partners while others are more interested in looking out for themselves.

The story starts slowly, as the players come together and cautiously, politely, sound each other out. Then the eldritch game begins. Who will survive until October 31st — and who will survive what happens on All Hallows Eve?

A Night in the Lonesome October is a highly unusual, imaginative, and sardonic thriller. It smoothly blends the stereotypes of classic horror fiction with the formalized moves of a game of *Clue* — with monsters and talking animals in the roles of Colonel Mustard and Mrs. Peacock.

Samurai Cat Goes to the Movies, written & illustrated by Mark E. Rogers. New York, Tom/Tom Dougherty Associates Book, October 1994, 286 pages, \$10.95; ISBN 0-312-85744-6.

I'm sorry, but my tolerance for "Concentrated Cute" was overwhelmed by halfway through the first chapter.

Emperors of the Twilight, by S. Andrew Swann. New York, DAW Books, January 1994, 283 pages, \$4.50; ISBN 0-88677-589-2.

Specters of the Dawn, by S. Andrew Swann. New York, DAW Books, August 1994, 284 pages, \$4.50; ISBN 0-88677-613-9.

These are the second and third novels in Swann's trilogy, which began with *Forests of the Night* (reviewed in *Yarf!* #26). That was a superbly written, although grittily depressing, political murder mystery set in a mid-21st-century society in which bioengineering has become common. America's ghettos are filled with "moreaus", animal-peoples who are mostly descendants of super-soldiers made to replace humans in armies of twenty to fifty years earlier. They have become the new lower class. Bioengineering of improved humans is illegal in most nations, but that has not stopped various security agencies who want their own super-agents. Most of this background was gradually built up in the story of Nohar Rajasthan, a cynical tiger private investigator who handles cheap but safe cases for the moreau community, until he is pressured to take an extremely dangerous investigation involving probable top-level corruption and murder in the U.S. Congress.

Emperors of the Twilight and *Specters of the Dawn* are less direct sequels than separate novels following two of the supporting characters from *Forests*. That was set in Cleveland in the early 2050s. *Emperors* and *Specters* are set in Manhattan and in San Francisco at the end of the decade. The three give readers a look at the human/moreau social situation as it develops over a decade, in three major urban centers across America.

Emperors of the Twilight is, technically, only a borderline 'morph novel. Its protagonist is Evi Isham, the "frank" (bioengineered human, or "frankenstein") federal agent who was assigned to track down Rajasthan in the first book. That was six years earlier, and she's practically forgotten that case. She has been assigned to a desk job in Manhattan since then. Four pages into the story, Evi is exercising on the balcony of her penthouse apartment when she becomes aware that a sniper is aiming at her from the adjacent building. Approximately the next 150 pages are high-intensity, exquisitely choreographed violence. Evi desperately struggles just to stay alive while being hunted by at least two rival assassination teams, who do not hesitate to explode whole buildings around her. Plenty of 'morphs are seen in brief supporting roles, but the main cast is all human.

Emperors is a tour de force in the genre of *Die Hard*-type thrillers. The action is non-stop, and the reader has to assume on faith until more than halfway through the novel that there will be a satisfactory justification for the never-ending, over-the-top mayhem. Swann brings it off! A real plot slowly, gradually emerges from the murk, and the reader is solidly with Evi as she begins to take command of the situation. *Emperors* is extremely

highly recommended, but readers should be aware that 'morph characters are downplayed except for one scene depicting the moreau radical underground in the Bronx.

'Morphs are highlighted again in *Specters of the Dawn*. Angel Lopez is the rabbit moreau teen gang member who Rajasthan rescued in *Forests*. She moved from Cleveland to "tolerant" San Francisco, and has been working as a waitress for the past seven years — a dead-end job, but the best honest work a moreau can hope for. She is wearily resigned to her lot when she meets Byron Dorset, a suave, sophisticated fox who saves her from a beating by punk human supremacists. In a nine-day whirlwind romance, Byron sweeps her off her feet, pours gifts upon her, hints at marriage, and is murdered. The shock of losing Byron, and the suspicion that the police will make a politically correct arrest of the supremacists rather than looking for the real killers, awakens her enough to realize that Byron himself was suspiciously too good to be true. Her smoldering investigation into who he really was, despite opposition from both moreau urban terrorists and conservative human federal bureaucrats, uncovers secrets that could touch off a long-feared human-moreau second Civil War — or control the 2060 presidential elections.

Swann develops these two taut thrillers with superb control. Both are filled with brutality in hate-filled 21st-century America, but they are handled quite differently. Evi in *Emperors* isn't aware why unexpected assassins are after her, but sudden death is part of a secret agent's job description. She knows how to handle overt, sustained violence — and Swann provides it for page after page without turning it into boring overkill. The mystery is less the killers' motivation as it is what deadly trap Evi will face next, and how she will get out of it.

Specters is a more conventional detective puzzler. The violence is more covert and sporadic, and Angel is no trained death machine. But she has her street smarts, and a fiery temper with the pressure of a lifetime of being pushed around behind it. The more that she learns, the more dangerous and higher-level the plot is revealed to be; the madder she gets. Mad enough to bring anybody and everybody down, if she can.

As with *Forests of the Night*, the moreaus' anthropomorphic nature is not just for decoration. Angel is a genetically engineered rabbit whose great-grandparents had been designed for combat as part of the Peruvian infantry. Her speed, the strength of her kick, and her other lepine attributes are key factors in *Specters'* action in several scenes.

Swann's three novels have been billed as a trilogy. It helps to read all three, but each of them is completely self-sufficient. There is also no reason to end them with *Specters of the Dawn*; there is still a whole world of human-moreau relationships to explore. ❄



A Story About Newts

Written and Illustrated by Kris Kreutzman

This reminds me of a story about newts. These are not ordinary newts, but highly flammable ones from deep in the Amazon jungle. In a remote and uncharted central corner of that vast and foreboding place lives a innocent but strange apparition of nature. Like all living things, that is what this newt likes to do, live. However, the newt has been found to be delicious by the predators of the region, including man. Because of this, the newt has evolved a rather bizarre and nonstandard defense. While other creature have wrapped themselves in camouflage or the stench of poison or other noxious chemical deterrents, this innovative salamander has gone one better. Its body secretes a substance that, either when dried or when the salamander panics, becomes extraordinarily flammable and explosive.

When an attempt is made to eat the newt, the predator finds its head blown off. Even this potent and effective defense does not dissuade the determined predators or man. After many failed attempts, early man found how to carefully capture and transport the newt to a remote location, how to kill it quickly and surprisingly, and how to dress and prepare the newt for eating by very quickly burning off the sebaceous fluids in a hot fire. Even toasted to charcoal, the newt is a renowned delicacy. However, if not prepared correctly, the newt will still explode vigorously in a series of firework-like bursts, sending the



cooking fire in all directions for hundreds of feet. No attempt is made to gather, cook, and eat newts in the dry season or near villages, due to the extreme fire hazard.

One early and innovative solution to the fire-scattering problem was to jam a stick into the newt through the mouth. This acted as a stabilizer and the ignited newt would fly off into the jungle to detonate at a reasonable distance away, say several miles. This technique was later used in intertribal warfare. (See next month's article on jungle warfare using native material.) Many in the halls of academia have wondered how early man learned to catch, prepare, cook, and eat this amazingly dangerous animal when — like tapioca, which takes many steps to prepare and which is poisonous at each intermediate step — the hunter, cook, and diner could shuffle off this mortal coil through any of a dozen missteps along the path to culinary perfection. Even the final step of eating the newt is filled with rituals and ceremonies of safety. Any leftover dried fluid on the newt and the eater will find himself with a new tooth cavity the size of the former tooth.

The introduction of modern technology and modern cooking methods has brought havoc to the newt-eating community. As in the days of old, new cooking techniques are sometimes tried to shorten the long and laborious process.





The introduction of metal pots has brought mixed reviews. By boiling the newt in well-kept secret mixtures, the cooking time is lengthened, but the dangerous and carefully controlled bonfire can be dispensed with. However, this cooking method is not without its drawbacks, as it seems to distill and concentrate the newt's explosive energies in a gooey energetic paste. Researchers have found several areas in the jungle with scorched clearings hundreds of feet in diameter, a blackened metallic lump in the exact center and reports of missing villages.

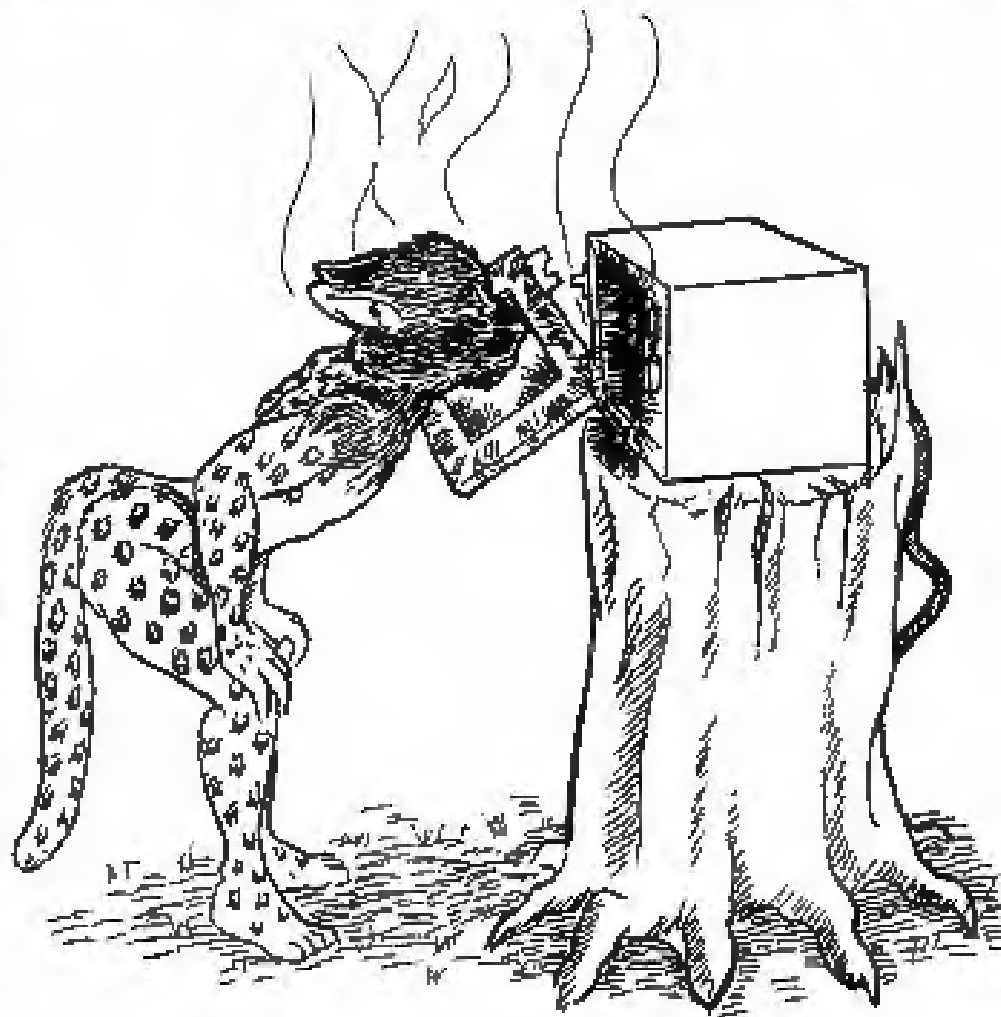
But perhaps the most bizarre and unforeseen effects are those created with the introduction of microwave ovens. The microwave oven is the zenith of newt cooking. Not only will it kill the newt without it panicking, and cook it without the long or laborious process of either fire or pots, but the end result tastes best as rated by the few remaining elder tribesmen who have actually survived eating a newt in the past. However, this is not a sure method of cooking the elusive *hors d'oeuvre*. Anthropologists and explosives and propulsion experts have been sifting through the remains of several former village sites to find the exact ingredients and microwave oven settings after a small metallic object was suddenly found in earth orbit by NASA tracking systems.

The use of newt secretions as a rocket fuel is not without its opponents. Some unscrupulous oil-producing countries, fearing that the newt will slow down the need for oil-based

fuels, have been buying up newts from native hunters. This trade in newts was suddenly brought to a close by world officials after Miami and several Florida coastal cities were swamped by a tidal wave. It would seem that a tanker carrying several thousand newts from Brazil to an undisclosed destination ran into trouble near Florida. The sinking ship caused the newts to panic, with predictable results.

After Miami, the countries buying the newts stopped the trade as being too dangerous. The tidal wave was called a freak atmospheric condition to cover up the true nature of the incident. However, animal rights activists were able to penetrate the deception and for the first time became aware of the newt's plight. The only reason we know of this is their adherence to videotaping everything using multiple cameras. Surviving footage shows the group attending a ritual bake-off. While the rest of the group were hassling the cooking staff on their cruelty to animals, one of the team reached into a newt holding pen to pet one of the occupants. Detailed analysis of two partially surviving tapes revealed almost simultaneous explosions from the cooking and holding areas. Later, this was confirmed by surviving tribal members who occupied the latest in newt cooking technology, the survival bunkers.

Great stories and myths surround this newt. Perhaps ancient myths of the fire salamander can now be explained by the amazing explosive newt of the Amazon. ❖



SOMEHOW THIS WASNT - UN-
QUITE THE IDEA I HAD IN
MIND FOR A VACATION

Hey - Oh!
This ain't
our bag!!

STUCK ON WHOOP!
UBANGI 2 - WITH
NO PLACE TO GO -
AND THEN.....

So far a lot of
laughter is heard
up to the next page!!

LOVE TO
CLARIFY
CLARITY

WONK!

BLEED BLEED
BLEED BLEED

NON-WOAH!!
HEY!
WATCH IT! UGL
GUMME HEAT
BACK YA LOUSY
TIN CAN!

KEEP YOUR
HANDS OFF
THIS
TIN

SLEEP
SLEEP

WARRR!

OH WELL --
SOME VACATION
THIS TURNED OUT
TO BE...
FUN

WE GOT OUT
NO THREAT TO
CUT US OFF!

I WONDER WHERE
EVERYTHING IS
AROUND HERE

FA
SOON

EXIT

TO THE NEXT PAGE

MEANWHILE...

and I got my share of...

THERE'S SOMETHING BRILLIANT ABOUT THIS CRATE HERE -

JUST WANT HIM IN A I PUNNY GUYS

YES PLEASE! LET HIM

IF WE JOIN IT RALPH'S GONNA GET COOL

MAYBE

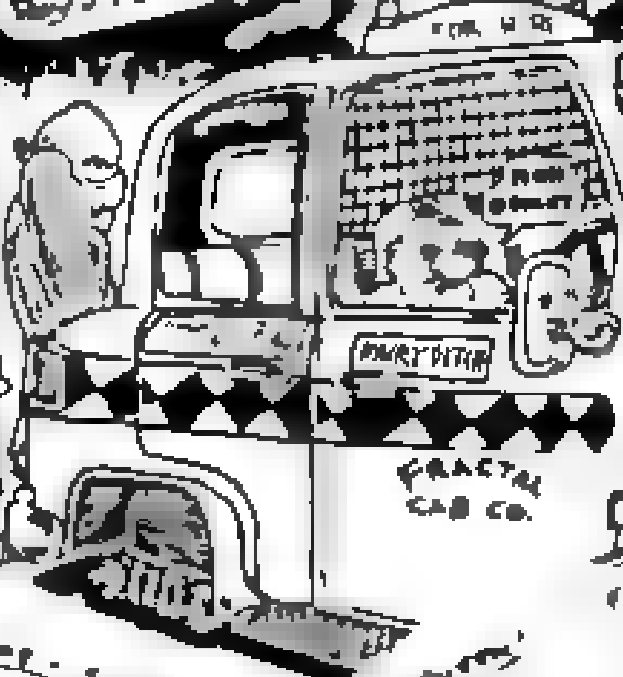
CREAK!

STORY BY JIM ALVES

RALPH THE WOODEN HAMSTER

INKS BY Ray's Pencil Co.

OH-HEY - WHAT LUCK! TAXI!



TAKE ME TO THE CITY CENTER

PUZZLE DOWN

HUH?

SO TELL ME - DO YA KNOW A PLACE WHERE A PAPER CAN GET HIMSELF FIXED UP?

Maybe this dog speaks to the paper over your a dog

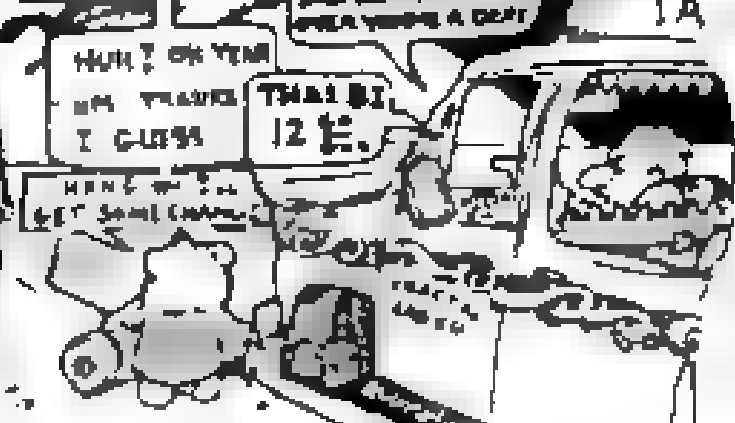
HUH? ON YEAH

WHY TRAVEL THAT BI I GUESS

12 \$.

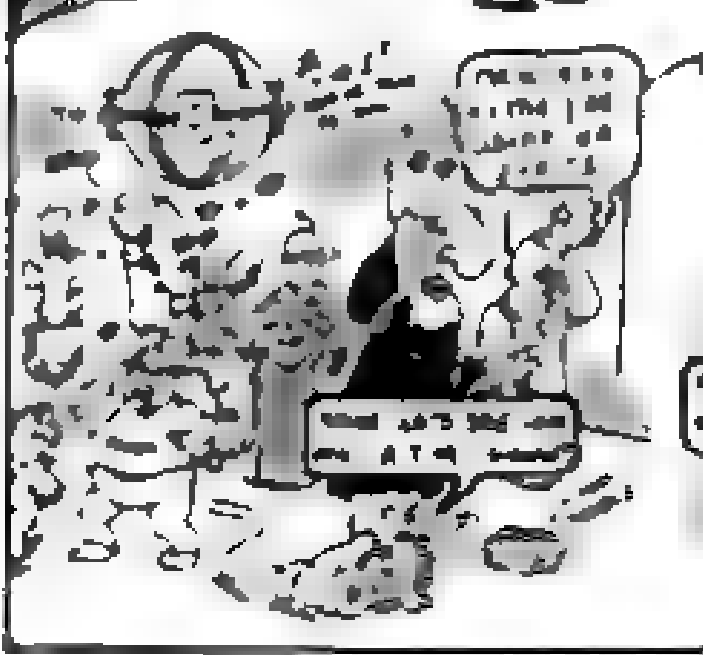
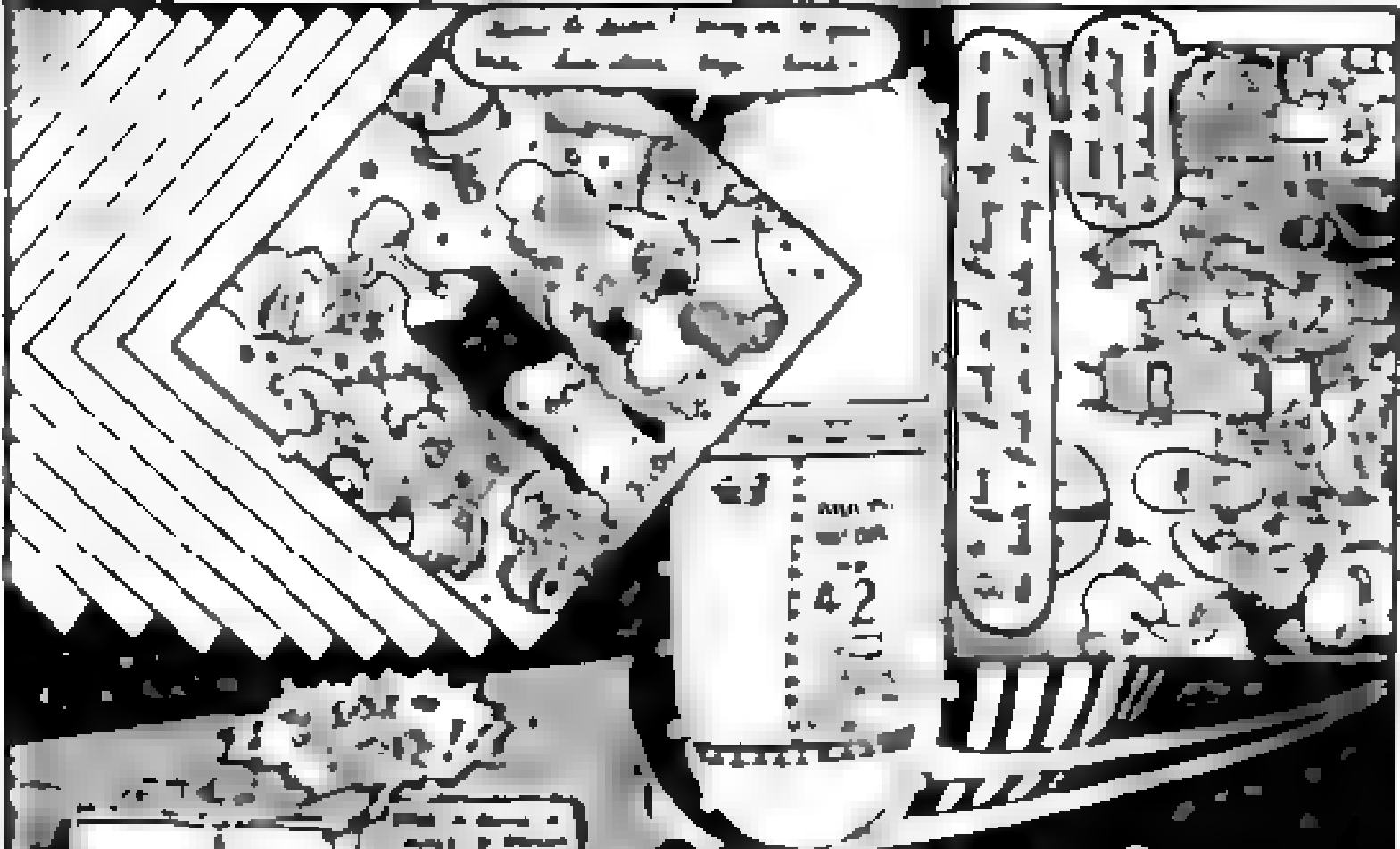
HUH? ... GET SOME CHANGE

SHY-SCARY-SMART-SMILE-SWEET





...and the
... ..



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... ..

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... ..

OUTSTANDING
AND FUTURE

AMERICAN
COURTESY

PUNCH
TIC-TAC

THE NEW RELEASE FROM THE
STUDIO'S GREAT HITS SERIES

THE NEW RELEASE FROM THE
LATEST TITLES OF THE YEAR

ANYTHING CAN DO TO HELP
PEOPLE JUST ASK FOR HE SHEILA
A MESSAGE OF ALL FEEL

TO BE CONTINUED...



Fit Panis Hominum

By Michael H. Payne

The morning sunlight off the shattered solar panels atop Marches Amalgamated Steel made Chelisse squint and stop on the sidewalk, the weed-cracked concrete on the other side of the fence so familiar. It could have been yesterday she had sneaked in here with the other neighborhood kids to toss stones at those panels, to laugh at their crash and dodge the raining glass and metal.

Chelisse gripped the chain-link, and it all came back summer days scrambling around the abandoned factories with Dawes and Chewa and Bemol, the games and the arguments and the adventures, the memories flooding over her with a sweetness she knew was absolutely phony.

She pushed away from the fence, trudged past the factory and into its shadow, the air still hot around her. Such a wonderful thing, nostalgia, gilding over the poverty, the uncertainty, the dimly understood dividing line that had sent her running whenever the echoes of human voices rang through the buildings. Human kids were different. Lived in their own part of town, were just as likely to throw stones at her as at the solar panels, and the constant warnings from adults had kept her wary of humans for years. Hell, she was still wary.

She shook the pictures from her head. No kids in the streets today, human or anthrop. Another summer had gone, though the first month of school was always hotter than any summer month, she remembered, the skies sharp and blue, her heart aching in that classroom, every recess a battle not to chuck it all, leap the fence, and run till her legs gave out.

She was getting that same feeling now, that same desperate yearning to be somewhere other than where she was. But the board of inquiry had recommended she take some time off after clearing her of all charges arising from the death of Howard Barker during that whole mess at the Shen-Hilton, and FN had insisted. "Two weeks with full pay," he had said, his moustache bunch-

ing up, "and I'll see you take it, weasel, if I have to personally chain you to your front porch."

Even Lorenz had agreed, combing his claws through her fur before he'd left for work. "You just relax, love. No one's ever deserved a vacation more."

Relax. Yeah, right. Two hours into the first day of her "vacation" and the inane chatter of phone-in talk shows had already driven her into wandering the streets aimlessly.

Well, maybe not aimlessly. Around Amalgamated Steel she came then, and sunlight caught the whitewashed steeple of St. Francis, sparking more memories. Sitting with her parents, the stained-glass windows washing color over her, fidgeting in her white robe at first communion, Wednesday afternoon religion classes, her confirmation at the Easter vigil, the sweet feel of the sunlight the morning she and Lorenz had spoken their wedding vows, singing along with the old organ on the Sundays she could get down here.

Chelisse gritted her teeth, forced the sugary visions away again, focused only on what was actually there in front of her, the long, low adobe building squaring between the corroded pieces of steel and glass, the big wooden door at the near end, pointed windows running around the walls. A ladder leaned against the front, a short human in black balanced precariously on top of it, a bucket in one hand, a dripping rag in the other, scrubbing the round window over the door.

Too old to be up there was her first thought, but that was more nostalgia. Even though he'd been around as long as Chelisse could remember, Father Cooper couldn't be much more than sixty and looked to be in better shape than Finn, no, that that was too dramatic a feat. Chelisse padded across the freshly-swept parking lot and stopped at the foot of the ladder. "Hey, Father," she called up.

He looked down and smiled. "Chelisse. Good to see you, we've missed you the past few Sundays."

"Yeah, well, all this stuff with the Barrows Dam's kept us pretty busy." She scratched at her side, felt skin flake, strands of fur pulling loose under her claw. "Do you have a minute, Father? To talk?"

"Of course." He plopped the rag into the bucket and started down the ladder. "Is this just a friendly chat, or do I need my priest-confessor outfit?"

"No, no." Chelisse swallowed. "I mean, it's just, that is, if you're busy, I can—"

"I could use the break, actually." He stepped off the last rung, wiped the sweat from his forehead. "Makes me wish I'd joined the Norbertines — at least I could wear white then." He set his bucket down and gestured toward the doorway. "Do you mind? It's a little cooler inside."

He had already pushed through the door, so Chelisse shrugged and followed him in, the dark, airy place opening up around her. Poking her claws at the dish of holy water, she crossed herself and padded after him down the center aisle. He dropped to one knee, then rose and settled into a pew, Chelisse genuflecting and sliding in beside him, the laminated wood cold even through her fur. The colors cast from the windows splashing past the Stations of the Cross along the walls and over the crucifix above the altar.

The knot in her stomach began unraveling. The supernatural she could take or leave, but she had never felt this same stillness, this same sense of calm, anywhere else. She blew out a breath. "I don't even know why I came. Father, I just... I don't know."

She heard the pew creak. "To talk, I thought you said. Anything in particular you had in mind?"

Chelisse let a few more breaths come and go. "Do you ever wish, father?"

"Wish?" He chuckled. "All the time. Wishing and praying have a lot in common, though confusing the one for the other can run you into—"

"No, no, no." She waved a paw around the church. "I mean, the pope doesn't exactly encourage baptizing anthropoids into the church, and all the garbage you've had to put up with because of all this..." She looked up at him. "Do you ever wish you hadn't gotten involved?"

He nodded. "I see. You walked all the way out here in this heat to talk about me."

She rolled her eyes. "I'm just asking, okay?"

"Well, then, I'll remind you that His Holiness doesn't discourage anthrop baptism, either."

"Not officially." Chelisse tapped the bench. "But if you'd stayed put, just filled your post at St. Moruca's downtown and served the folks there the way you were supposed to, that would've been a lot easier on you, right?"

Father Cooper tapped his fingertips together. "That all depends on how you define easy."

"Well, I can tell you how I don't define it." Chelisse counted off on her claws. "It's not coming out here against your superiors' orders, it's not building this church, and it's not preaching human-anthrop equality. It's not sticking your neck out so far, you're practically inviting someone to come along and chop your head off, and it's not—"

"So many notes, Chelisse." He grinned, shook a finger at her. "You'll be yourself up."

"I'm serious, Father!"

"So am I." He sat back. "All right. Let me ask you this: have you ever heard of William of Occam?"

Chelisse blinked at him. "Some ancient monk maybe?"

"Very good." Father Cooper's voice slid into the cadence Chelisse had so often heard in his sermons. "A thousand years ago, William of Occam did one of the foundation stones in the building of modern thought: Occam's Razor, we call it: the simplest solution to a problem is most likely the correct one. Simplest, you'll notice. Not easiest."

She blinked some more. "You lost me, Father."

"Simple is not easy, and easy is not simple. They mean two very different things."

Chelisse pursed her lips. "Okay fine. Be that way. Don't tell me."

He leaned forward. "I am telling you, Chelisse. As you said, staying at St. Moruca's would've been much easier for me. Ignoring a perceived problem is always easiest, right? Pretending a problem doesn't exist, doing nothing, sitting quietly, and hoping it'll work itself out, that's another trait we humans and anthropoids share, isn't it?"

"So?"

"So I couldn't do it, couldn't ignore things and take the easy way out. Had to answer to William of Occam."

She cocked her head. "Correct me if I'm wrong, father, but I doubt William of Occam ever talked about anthropoids."

"No." His voice grew quieter. "But Father Metembe did."

The name stirred slightly in Chelisse's mind, but she couldn't tell why. "Who?" she finally had to ask.

"Another monk, back when the first real anthropoids started coming out. He argued that we had passed our fallen nature on to you by using human DNA patterns in your development, that we had an obligation to bring the gospel to you the same way we did to any group of humans."

"Ah, right. You've talked about him in your sermons."

"He was quite the scholar." Father Cooper shook his head. "Of course, when I first read his work, I saw it

more as a well-argued piece of abstract reasoning than anything else. I'd grown up on Mars, after all, attended seminary on Earth, had my first posting at Our Lady of Fatima on Dei B. planets who had long ago sent most of their anthropods out into the frontier to settle more worlds for human colonization." He smiled. "But then, I was assigned to Marches."

Chelisse had to smile back. "So much for abstract."

"Exactly. And remember this was thirty-five years ago, just when folks were starting to realize what the agreement with the Glist was going to mean around here. Glist technology uses so little metal, the mines stopped paying, and since the only thing the Glist had asked for in return was that we stop grabbing new planets, Marches suddenly had two million out-of-work anthrop miners and no more frontier to send them off to." He sighed, the sound echoing through the church. "Ugly isn't a strong enough word for what I saw when I arrived here."

"Yeah, I've read the histories." Chelisse tapped a claw. "Lynchings and bombings and arson and all. But it seems to me that stuff'd make you think more than twice about founding St. Francis. Talking about human-anthrop equality with all that going on couldn't've made you very popular."

"True. But remember William of Occam."

"Occam. Right. Simple. not easy."

"Exactly. Easy would have been to ignore that no church on Marches allowed anthrop worshippers. Simple was to make a few modest suggestions. He shrugged. "An anthrop mass on Saturday evening, a catechism program, a mission church here in the anthrop quarter, all of them very simple—"

"And all of them ignored."

"Yes." His smile went sideways. "So I took the next simplest step. I came out here and did it myself." Father Cooper turned to her, his voice quiet. "But that's enough about me, don't you think?"

Chelisse swallowed, looked away. Her thoughts tumbling like water over stone in the sudden stillness. "I'm just, I don't know, just tired, I guess."

"Tired? Of what?"

"Of everything." She waved a paw. "I mean, I look at you and this church, and I think about the threats and the fire bombs and all the times you've had to rebuild, and I—" She raised her eyes to his. "And, try to imagine what keeps you here, why you stick with it." She couldn't stop a grin from tickling her whiskers. "I mean, other than William of Occam, of course."

Father Cooper nodded. "Well, he's the main reason. You have no idea how strict he can be." His eyes lost their focus, and he turned toward the altar. "But it's a calling, you see. I became a priest because I felt it was the right

thing for me to do, and I started St. Francis for the same reason." He shrugged. "I may be wrong, of course. The next news capsule might bring a papal bull declaring that anthropods have no share in our human estate that animals you never fell from grace and therefore have no need for salvation, no need for the church, no need for me. I sometimes wonder what I'd do if that happens."

He turned back then and spread his hands. "But I don't dwell on it. I've got too many windows to wash." He cocked his head. "Is any of this helping at all? I'm sorry if it's not, but, well, when I don't know what the problem is, I'm not very good at finding solutions."

"The problem." Chelisse kept her eyes on the back of the pew in front of her, on the little rack with the songbooks and missalettes in it. "Father [] killed two people, shot one of 'em point-blank with a flare gun, and he just, his clothes, the medic said they were so cheap and greasy, he didn't have a chance — he just went up like a torch." She shook her head, tried not to hear that crackling scream, tried not to smell the frying stink that still stroked at her whiskers. "And Bond, when I told them what he — they, they just wiped him, started over, built him into someone else entirely, and I —" Her throat closed, and she had to stop.

For a moment, things stayed quiet. Then she heard Father Cooper shift on the pew next to her. "From what I read, this was all in the line of duty, wasn't it?"

She managed to nod, still not able to look at him.

"So the problem then is whether you want to keep on in your chosen profession. Is that right?"

Chelisse jerked her head up. "What? Why would you — where did you — that's not what I was talking about!"

"Oh? Weren't you just asking me if I ever wished I hadn't gotten involved around here? I figured you might be having second thoughts about your role with EMS."

"What?" Chelisse could only sputter for a moment, the idea too strange for her to imagine. "How could I — how could you think that I wanted to leave EMS? I mean, you've got a better chance of leaving the priesthood than I have of — it's just — how could you even—"

"Then you were just making idle chit-chat earlier?"

"No!" With an effort, Chelisse got hold of herself, took a breath, lowered her voice. "It's just that you've had to put up with so much because of what you believe in, and I, well, I'm trying to understand how you get through it."

"So you believe in EMS?"

"Of course I do!"

"Then I don't see how killing those people is a problem."

"What?" She stared at him. "How can you say that? Father [—"

"You did your job." He spread his hands. "You're an EMS agent. Chelisse, and as I understand it that means you work as everything from a janitor to a sworn peace officer. Maybe you like the janitor part better than the peace officer part, but you have to perform over that whole spectrum in order to do the job correctly. Am I right?"

Chelisse didn't answer, didn't really want to answer. Father Cooper went on, "All right. Suppose the news comes tomorrow from the Vatican that His Holiness has decided anthropos are not to be preached to, are not to be allowed into the church. That then becomes a part of my job description, a job that I believe in and have devoted my entire adult life to. Am I going to be in the same position you are now?"

"You know it's not the same," Chelisse mumbled into her whiskers.

"Of course it isn't, but every organization has rules for its employees. If I have a problem with one of those rules, then it's up to me to work things out, talk with my superiors, to try to come up with some solution."

"Unless you quit," she said, her eyes fixed on the floor.

"Unless I quit." Chelisse felt his hand touch the fur at her shoulder. "But I would have to be damn sure I had no other options."

The knot in her stomach was back. "I can't quit. Father. It's... it's my life, not just my job. I mean, sure, could probably get work busing tables or sweeping stairs somewhere, but EMS..." She looked up at him. "Like you said, it's a calling. It's all I've ever wanted to do."

He was nodding. "And, from what I understand, you're pretty good at it."

"Shut," she hissed. "If I'm so good, why couldn't I come up with a better plan than blowing that idiot up? Why didn't I make a better argument to get Bond counseling instead of brain death? Why wasn't I able to see—?"

"Well, there you have it." Father Cooper clapped his hands, the sound echoing in the church and making Chelisse start back.

She blinked at his grin. "What? Have what?"

"The problem, the basic human problem. You handled a situation as best you could, but now you wish your best had been better." He spread his hands. "Nobody's perfect. Chelisse, but here you sit, wanting to be flawless. That's as human as it gets."

"What?" Chelisse stared at him. "You're crazy!"

"I get told that a lot, yes."

She tapped herself on the chest. "All I want to do is my job! Where's the problem in that?"

"Nowhere. The problem comes when you start beating yourself up for not performing at these unrealistic levels. You get all morose and end up telling your friendly neigh-

borhood priest that he's crazy."

Chelisse held her breath, wanting to shout at him but certain she had no reason to. "I don't know if that makes me feel better or worse."

"Yes, I seem to have that effect on people. Part of my own problem with perfection, I guess."

Her stomach had loosened enough for her to give a little laugh. "So what am I supposed to do?"

"Well, you can always take the easy way out, stop trying for perfection, let yourself settle for mediocrity." He shook his head. "But William of Occam—"

"Don't even say it." She poked a claw at him. "I'll bet you just made this Occam character up."

He raised a hand. "Swear on a stack of Bibles, he's for real." His voice quieted. "We're all called to perfection, Chelisse, all called to follow the path laid before us. It's not an easy path, not anywhere near easy, but, well, that's what the church is here for: to let us gather together, listen to the words of that call, take strength from one another and carry on." He shrugged. "When it's all working correctly, that is."

"Yeah." She looked around. "And when it's not..."

Father Cooper sighed. "We're all humans here, every one of us. And humans stumble. That's why we pray for the Church at every mass, and why we pray for each other." He stretched. "What you really need, of course, is some good, honest gruntwork. I know a cushy job like yours doesn't often allow you to get your paws dirty."

Chelisse grinned. "Well, I mean, with the cost of manures these days..."

"Exactly. It just so happens, however, that I have an extra bucket somewhere around here, and several dirty windows that are crying out for someone with a neurotic need to clean up after other people."

"Ah. This is my penance I take it?"

"No, no. I'll give you lunch and everything."

"Ah. That's my penance."

Father Cooper rolled his eyes. "Fine. Forget I even offered. Boy, try to do a good deed these days..."

Chelisse slipped into the aisle. "I'll finish the rose window, you can get started on the rest. Seeing a venerable old man such as yourself up on that ladder gives me the twitch."

His laugh rang through the church behind her. "Oh, sure. Now I actually have to find my other bucket."

She reached the doors and pulled them open, the heat of the day outside mixing with the cool air around her and making her shiver. "Well," she called back, "noona ever said life was gonna be easy."

SAN DIEGO COMIC CON 94

HAVING THE ALARM CLOCK SET FOR 5AM TO CATCH A 7AM FLIGHT, REBEKAH SLEEPS, SHUTS OFF THE ALARM, I AWAKE AT 6:15. IMMEDIATE PANIC SETS IN, I FLY DOWN THE FREEWAY TO MILWAUKEE.



TO ARRIVE IN TIME TO SEE MY PHONE LEAVE



WELCOME TO MILWAUKEE FIELD

AAAAGGH!!



FINALLY CONNECTING TO CHICAGO, AND RUNNING INTO VICKY LYMAN AND ERIC BLOOMRICH ON THE SAME FLIGHT OUT TO SAN DIEGO.



PITCH BERIO DOES HIS IMPERSONATION OF "COMETS INTO JUPITER" WITH ERASERS

YEAH IMPACT! SEE THE HUGE BLACK IMPACT AREA!



MESSING WITH BLOOMRICH'S MIND

DRAW HIM AS A HERMAPHRODITE

YEAH ERIC AS A HERMAPHRODITE.

WHAT?! NO WAY ASSHOLES!



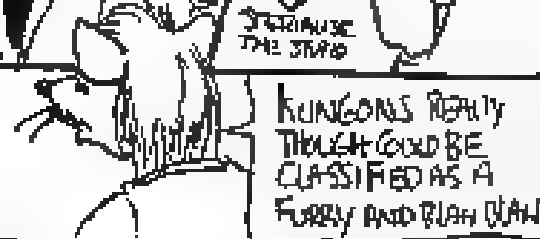
FOLKS LIKE WILLIAM HASKILL, SEAN MADDOY AND MICHAEL DANIAHER JOIN IN TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THE JAPANESE RESTAURANT SUSHI DELIS CHEAP AND EXCELLENT FOOD



THE PANEL ON ANTHROPOMORPHIC FULL FRONTAL NUDITY SUE DAVIS, UJA GRAF RICH CHANDLER, FRED PATTEN, TED SHEPPARD AND I. THE PANEL WAS SIDETRACKED BY AN IDIOT TALKING ABOUT BABYLON 5, ZIMA BEER COMMERCIALS AND NALIA MOTORCYCLES, WASTING VALUABLE TIME



THIS SAME BUTTWIFE LATER BOILED THE SAME STOUT ON THE PANEL ON ARMED FURRIES. COMPLETELY ANNOYING TO THE PANELISTS AND AUDIENCE. AGAIN WASTING TIME.



ELIN WINKLER AND MELODY RENDEAU DO THEIR DUMBS BLONDS FROM HELL



LINDSY BRINGS HIS MULLPEDE, JASMINE BRINGS HER RAT



MY BUG OUTCLASSES YOUR RAT

THOSE BUTTS - THE DEEFOUES

LINDSY AND LANCERLIND FACE OFF IN ARM P FARTS



BETCHA I AM HIM

NO WAY I LWIN!

GANG STRUNG THAT NOTED PEST MICHAEL HORTIES, AND THERE WAS GREAT BELONGING



KILL!

BLUMRICH SOMEHOW LOSE HIS ART PORTFOLIO



I'M NOT HAPPY
EXCUSE ME WHILE I GO DRINK BLEACH

RED SHOWS UP IN UNIFORM



WHAT THE?

OH MY

SHE GOT RECED WITH THE SISTERHOOD SO SHE JOINED THE MARINE CORPS. NOW SHE GRUNTS AN M-60 INTO BATTLE

STUCK BEHIND THE TABLE, PAUL RIDD AND RICH CHANDLER HELPED BY TRYING TO PICK UP MY ART FROM THE ART SHOW. NO LUCK AT ALL



BLOODY HELL!!! THEY'RE USIN' LIMPS!

YEAH, BUT SO MANY EXCTING

AND STAY OUT

MEL WHITE, TERRIE SMITH AND I PANIC OVER INCREASED TABLE COSTS FOR 95.

AAAGGGH!!!

NOW THE CONVENTION CENTER IS RUNNING THINGS?

1995 SAN DIEGO CONVENTION COSTS



INDIAN SHAMAN GARY BELL DOES A CLEANSING CEREMONY AND BLESSING TO MY UNBORN CHILD. MEL WHITE AND SCOTT RUGGELS WITNESS THIS CEREMONY



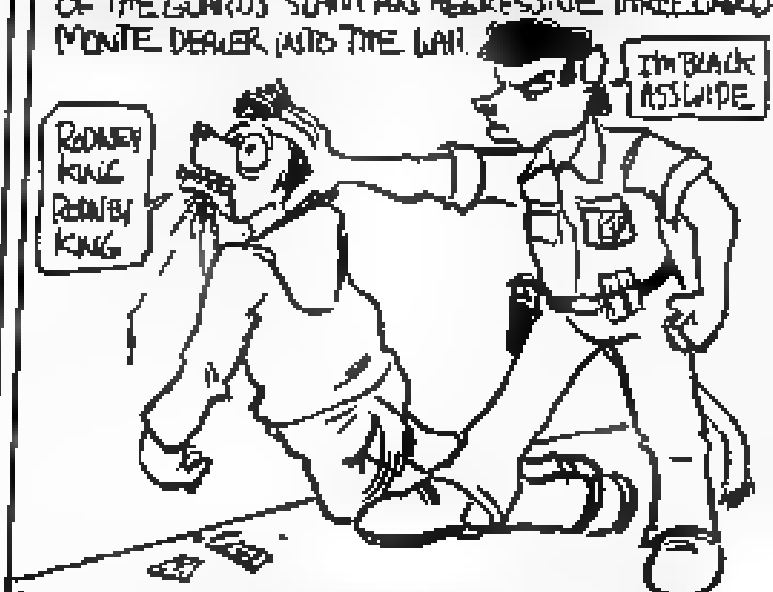
SINCE THE FLIGHT OUT WAS AT 11AM, MEL WAS STAYING TIL MONDAY MORNING. ERIC AND I DECOMPRESS AS BEST WE COULD. I TRIED TO GET A FLIGHT OUT ON MONDAY. NO LUCK - THE RED EYE FOR BOTH OF US



WHILE BACK AT THE HOTEL SAN DIEGO I WITNESS ONE OF THE GUARDS SLAM AN AGGRESSIVE THREE CARD MONTE DEALER INTO THE WALL.

RODNEY KING BEAT BY KING

I'M BLACK ASS WIDE



A TRASHY OLD WHORE HIT UP ON ME OUTSIDE OF THE HOTEL WANTING SEX FOR A NIGHT'S STAY. HSD GUARD TOLD ME SHE HAD FULL BLOWN AIDS



CHICAGO. ERIC AND I AWAIT 3 1/2 HOURS AWAITING OUR FINAL FLIGHTS HOME. WE SPENT THE TIME REVIEWING THE CON AND PEOPLE

GADS I WANTED TO KILL HIM

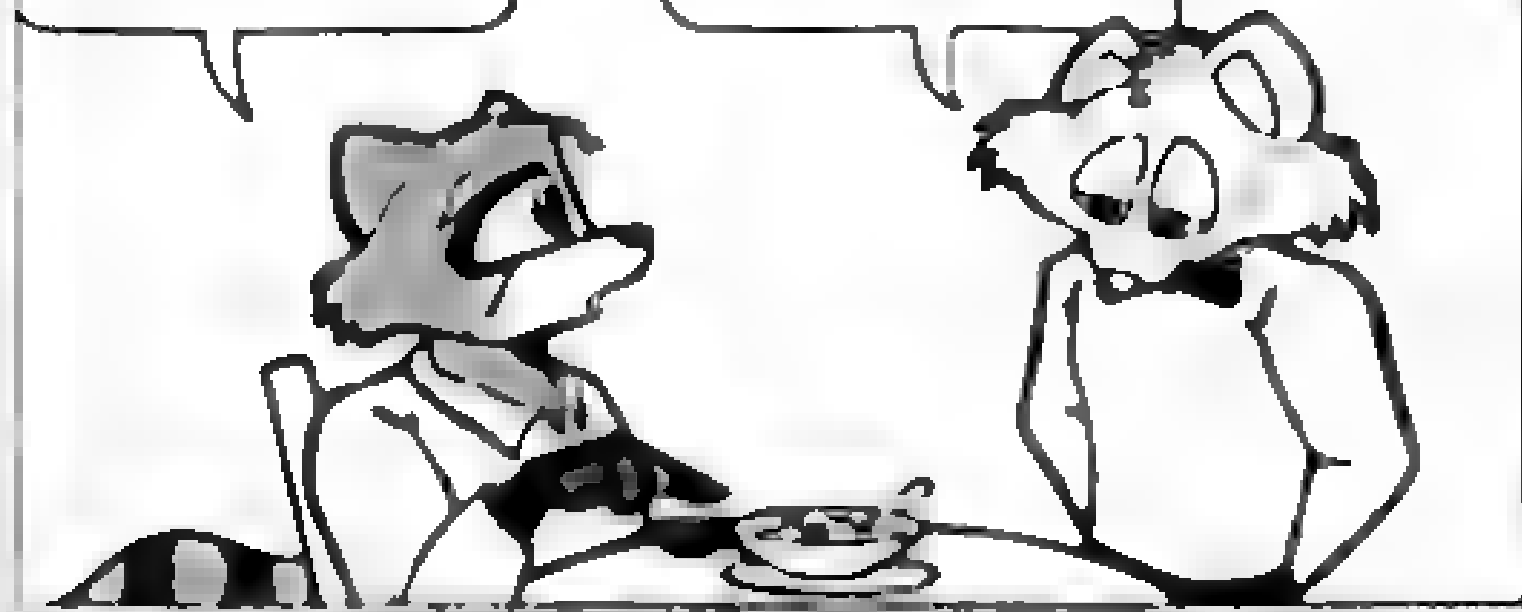
YOU SHOULD HAVE

I WOULD



WAITER, THERE'S A
FLY IN MY SOUP.

ZAT IS NOT A FLY,
ZAT IS A...



BOOM!

...NITRO BEE.





Happily, Ever After

By Tim Susman

Standing outside the run-down building, Korlon took the locket out of his pocket again. The curl of fine white hair lay within, unaffected by the passage of years, and unruffled now by the soft breeze. He stared at it another second, then entered the building.

It took a moment for his vision to adjust to the darkness inside. The bright wallpaper was tattered and faded, the lights broken. Tables were arrayed in the same pattern as always, but dust was their tablecloth now, and the chairs were strewn haphazardly about as though by an air elemental. Korlon saw further, beyond the disrepair, to his first visit here, where he caught his first glimpse of her.

. . .

It was a canines-only bar, but Korlon's teacher was a worker of Illusions and a keen connoisseur of female felines, and so for this Friday evening, he had disguised the two of them as dogs and sprayed them with tau de chien, so that they could get in to see Persian Paulette. The dog at the door didn't even give them a second glance, but Master Baeri still hissed at Korlon when the young student gawked at the gaudy interior. In feline bars, the lighting was dim and the decorations muted, the atmosphere more conducive to personal evenings. Here, it would be impossible to hold a personal conversation, as much because of the noise level as of the possibility of someone nosing in.

They chose a table close to the stage and endured the canine yammering as best they could. Most of the clientele were dogs, although a few foxes slunk around the corners, and a coyote was waited on hand and paw at a nearby table. A French poodle in a shiny outfit walked up to their table as Korlon was looking around.

"What'll it be, gents?" she asked brusquely. Korlon looked helplessly at Baeri, he usually ordered catnip and cream, but he doubted a canine bar would stock that.

"Two ales." Baeri said. The poodle marked something down, then looked suspiciously at Korlon.

"Hey, kid," she began.

Oh, no! She noticed me! Korlon felt his blood surge, and his claws extended automatically.

"Let's see some ID," she continued, holding out her hand.

She hadn't noticed his claws. Korlon carefully withdrew

them again, then reached into his pocket for his badge. He handed it to her nervously.

She looked at it for a moment, then handed it back to him carelessly when the magical gem remained bright blue. "Okay." Sliding smoothly between the tables, she soon disappeared behind the bar.

"Good thing she didn't notice your claws, kid," Baeri said in a undertone, and Korlon felt his fur prickle. He should have known Baeri would, the old wizard didn't miss much. He wondered why Baeri hadn't disguised him as an older dog, but knew better than to ask. The old wizard didn't appreciate his mistakes being pointed out.

"Sorry," he mumbled. "I thought she saw —" He choked off suddenly, realizing what he had been about to say.

Baeri said it anyway. "Through my illusion? You didn't trust me?"

"No, it's not that," Korlon said miserably. "It's —"

"Used magic to fake your ID? Pretty good trick that. Never think of it myself." The bright, perky voice came from a red-furred dog at the table behind Baeri. He was alone except for the five empty mugs on his table.

Baeri turned around. "I'm surprised you manage to think of anything," he snapped.

"Bashi's teeth, I'm sorry," muttered the redhead, and he buried his face in the ale he was holding. "No need to bite my head off."

Baeri turned back, but whatever he was going to say was interrupted by the waitress bringing their drinks just as the unbearably bright lights dimmed. Korlon sipped the ale, grimaced at its sourness, and turned to face the stage.

The first act was a comedian, whose atrocious mouse jokes were as unpopular as his pathetically contrived chase of the spotlight across the stage. He finally gave up in exasperation when the crowd started howling. "Go howl at the moon!" he yelled, and stalked off the stage.

The howls died, the spotlight shifted to a deep blue, though the stage remained empty. Then Korlon, looking into the dark corner of the stage, saw what most of the dogs probably could not: the cat herself, waiting for her cue. Her fur was a soft white, cleaner and purer than any he had ever seen. Makeup, he told himself, but that didn't stop his mouth from going dry as she shifted her feet restlessly, revealing perfect curves even through long fur.

A low horn sounded from somewhere, and she walked into the spotlight, faced the crowd, and slowly smiled. Baeri's canine mouth dropped, and Korlon felt his muscles tense, not noticing that his claws were out again until they dinked against his mug. Then she began to dance.

The wallpaper faded, the obtrusive canine scent was gone. Korlon's eyes and nose were filled with her graceful moves, her delicate scent. It was only a striptease, but she moved with such finesse that the limited dance seemed to confine her in its crude movements. She performed the garish ritual with a skill that showed she was capable of much more, so that to Korlon, it seemed that only an eyeblink later she stood fully revealed before the crowd. Korlon felt as though she had performed the dance for him alone, and was embarrassed to find himself unconsciously responding to her. Self-consciously, he straightened his robe just as the horns finished with a triumphant flourish and the spotlight went out.

Korlon watched her walk with tired dignity across the darkened stage and accept a robe from an outstretched hand. Then the house lights brightened, and he lost sight of her in the sudden glare.

Baeri, he noticed when he turned around, still gazed raptly at the stage. His claws were fully extended across the curve of the ale mug he clenched in his hand. Korlon waited patiently until Baeri noticed him, at which point the claws snapped back and the old cat straightened his robe nonchalantly.

"Good, eh?" Baeri whispered across the table.

Korlon nodded. "Fantastic," he said. "Why doesn't she dance in cat bars?"

"Are you kidding?" Baeri returned scornfully. "The cats would be all over her. Besides, where could she do something like this?"

He was right, of course. Stripteases, although common in the rodents' bars and in some canine bars, were not usually popular with the more withdrawn felines. And Korlon was just as glad. He was already determined to meet her, it would be much easier without having to compete with a crowd of admirers.

He left Baeri, making an excuse about his stomach that he was sure the wizard saw through. Prowling around outside, it only took him a few minutes to find the back entrance to the bar. A cursory sniff told him that she had not yet left, so he settled down in a dark corner to wait.

His patience was soon rewarded. The door sighed open, and a white furry body stepped cautiously into the alley. She stopped immediately as the door swung closed. "Who's there?" she called, sniffing the air. Her voice was as pure and powerful as her dancing.

"An admirer." Korlon said, stepping out behind her. "I really enjoyed your act."

"I don't do mutts," she said, eyes narrowed.

"Huh? Oh — I had to do that to get in," he said, realizing that he still reeked of *eau de chien*.

She looked closer. "So you did. Just to see me?" He nodded. "Well, come on, mutt," she said. "You can walk me home."

She lived in a dingy studio apartment in a cold stone building. Korlon couldn't help staring as they walked in. "I'd think someone as talented as you could... well, would have your own place."

She lit a candle and turned, smiling. "This is my own place. Have a seat."

He sat gingerly on one of the cushions. The room was filled with her scent and it was making him a little giddy. He tried shaking his head slightly, to clear it, but the gesture didn't help much.

"What do you do?" she asked, looking into a mirror as she combed through her fur.

"Me? Oh, I'm an apprentice," he said, looking around at the plain cushions, and the rug that didn't really cover the wood floor. No kitchen, no bathroom except for a tub and chamberpot, but then, only the most luxurious apartments afforded such facilities.

Her tone was amused. "An apprentice what?" she asked.

A warm flush crept up Korlon's face, and he noticed a faint smile on her face when he turned to look at her. "Magician," he said. "I, uh, do magic."

Her smile broadened. "A magician, eh? I've known a few magicians, but all they ever wanted was to get me into bed." She raised her eyebrows as his tail swished self-consciously. "Or are you too young for that kind of talk?"

He shook his head quickly. "No, I'm full citizen."

She nodded and walked over to the tub. "How long?" she asked, reaching into it and drawing out a dripping towel.

"Um, almost a year." He stopped in surprise as she tossed the wet towel to him.

"Here, it's clean. Wash that dog smel off, mutt," she said, smiling.

* * *

The smell of dog was still thick in the bar, but old. Korlon traced a pattern through the dust on one table, absently. The memories were so clear, so that first night with her. Looking up at the stage he could almost see her as clearly as if Baeri were sitting with him again. The smell of the wet towel she had tossed him was faint, but purely here, devoid of perfume or makeup, and it was sharp in his mind. In his ears, he could still hear her calling him "mutt."

He closed his eyes, wondering why he remembered that night so well. Even the night they first shared a bed was not as clear in his memory as that first encounter, when a nervous young apprentice and a more jaded young dancer had first glimpsed each other. What had grown from that encounter - he had never believed that he could be that close to someone, that he could share dreams and life so thoroughly.

The thick dust made his fingers feel dirty. He opened his eyes, looking down at the pattern he'd traced. Was that all that was left of their dreams, of their lives?

* * *

"One day," she said, legs tucked below her on the bed. "I will go to the Twin Peaks and dance in the City of a Thousand Colors."

"You'll be the best there," Korlon replied, scratching her back.

"And you'll be there with me, won't you?"

"As the best magician in Fyrd," he replied.

"I'll wait while you learn," she promised, "training."

"And I'll wait while you train," he promised, "learning." They sealed the bargain with a kiss.

* * *

The memory of her lips still lingered on his, making his fist clench partially extended claws digging into his palm. Forcing his hand open, he tried to breathe normally, to relax himself, but there was still a painful knot inside him. She had trained, and he had learned, and every week, she would dance here, and he would come watch. Trusty, the old hound who owned the bar, had made an exception to the 'no cats' rule on nights when Paulette was dancing, just for him.

Two of the stools had fallen over, but Korlon could still remember the regulars who'd sat on those stools every night he'd been there, and probably the other six nights as well. He'd become a regular over the next two years, but had never developed a friendship for any of the bar-dogs except Trusty. The old hound had even ordered a small supply of catnip and creme, and some nights he sat with the young apprentice before Paulette came out.

* * *

"Women, m'boy," Trusty said, "just ain't worth it."

Usually Korlon humored the old dog, but tonight he'd already had one drink and the better part of another. "Why not?" he challenged. "When Paulette and I are together, I feel more alive than I ever have before. How can that not be worth it?"

Trusty growled, and took another drink of thick black

ale. "Oh, you may think it's worth it now, boy. But trust me, nothing lasts forever."

A stubborn look on his face, Korlon took another sip of his drink, too. "We will," he insisted.

A chuckle escaped the old dog's lips and he patted Korlon's paw. "Maybe you will, at that," he said gruffly, grinning. "I oughta know better'n to try I talk sense at young love."

* * *

Alone amidst the dust, Korlon shook his head. *No, Trusty, you were more right than you knew*, he thought.

* * *

"You have to —"

"Go away. Baeri says that to graduate, I have to 'find my own magic, which means travel around the country."

"You didn't know about this before?"

Korlon looked a little guilty. "I'd been hoping I could get out of it, and I didn't want to worry you..." his voice trailed off.

"How long?" she sighed, one paw resting on his shoulder.

"He won't say. But I asked around, and the other two teachers in the city say it could be anywhere from a month to a year. And... I might not come back."

"What?"

"If... if I find my magic, it might kill me. Or I might find the wrong one. Or I might not find any."

"Don't say that. Of course you'll succeed. You're going to be the best in the world, remember?" She smiled weakly, not even convincing herself. Korlon just hung his head.

"I'll go with you," she offered, finally knowing his answer before he gave it.

"No. I have to go alone. And besides... you need to practice. You're going to the City of a Thousand Colors, aren't you?" She nodded, a tear forming in her eye. "Well, I'll be there to see it. And I'll be back as soon as I can."

"I'll be here, mult." But the day he left on his quest, he knew with a sinking feeling that their love was over. Their dreams were taking them in different directions, and abandoning those dreams would kill their love as effectively as this cleaner separation.

A year and a half later, he rode into town on the back of a magical herdbeast conjured from a bone, hoping against hope that she would be there, only to find that she had vanished without a trace. Trusty professed ignorance, saying sadly that more than a year ago, she "up'n left, without a word." Korlon searched the bars and ballets

with no luck, and every night conjured up her image from the lock of hair she had left him. He didn't know then, how to use the fur to locate her; although sympathetic magic — like calling to like — was his specialty, it was so much easier just to call something out of the magical firmament that it had taken many years to learn to link two like things in the tangible world. That was the reason he hadn't searched for her sooner. The only reason

He tried to work in the city, but it held too many memories for him, so he settled as far away from it as possible. In the intervening years, he had not returned, and he was back now to choose an apprentice — and to find her.

• • •

The ruined bar blurred in his sight. He wiped the tear away and looked around one last time. In the dark shadows of the stage, a figure stirred. Korlon caught his breath in senseless hope and then his eyes focused on the old brown hound.

The years had not been kind to Trusty. He emerged from the shadows slowly, leaning heavily on the wooden cane that was as gnarled and twisted as he was. "Nothin' here f'ya ta take, ya vulture," he wheezed, hobbling up to Korlon. Supporting his weight on a table, he brandished the cane. "Now clear out afore I clear ya out!"

"Take it easy, old friend," Korlon said. "It's only me."

Trusty peered closer. "Say, The cat came back. Y ever find Paulette?"

Korlon shook his head. "No. What happened to the bar?"

Trusty spat to one side. "Stinkin' rodent-lovers. Closed down my bar 'cause o' a few back taxes. Left me in the cold."

"What do you eat?" Korlon asked, concerned.

"This 'n that," the hound said, his gaze drifting aimlessly along the tables. "Racht's tail, she used to be so pretty."

"Used to be?" Korlon asked, startled.

"Well, she sure ain't now." Trusty gestured to the walls. "Or ain't ya looked around none?"

"Oh, the bar. I thought you meant — never mind."

They stood in silence, lost in private worlds of memory. After several minutes, Korlon looked around once more, then reached out to shake Trusty's hand. "I've got to go. I'll see you around."

Trusty's grip was weak. His hand frail and brittle. "Not likely," he coughed. Korlon turned away in silence; he didn't need medical training to know what the old hound meant.

Outside, he took the lock of hair out again. Like to like, he thought, concentrating. *She's somewhere in the city. Take me to her.*

The hair tugged at his grip, leading him out of the slums and into the heart of the city. He skirted market stalls and pedestrians, singlemindedly intent on reaching his destination.

It pulled him toward a luxurious house near the main Council building and the President's mansion. He tried to go around the house, but anywhere he walked, he was pulled back toward it. *Maybe she's struck it rich*, he thought, but he was certain that it wasn't her house. Nevertheless, he mustered his courage and knocked at the ornate door.

An elegantly dressed Siamese answered the door. His robe was black with white trim, pure silk from the look of it. Korlon fingered his coarse blue robe and spoke hesitantly.

"Is Paulette in?"

The Siamese regarded him with haughty disdain. "Madame Herbane is very busy. Are you expected?" His nose wrinkled, as if the very idea were repugnant.

Korlon put the lock of hair in an empty vial and handed the locket to the servant. "Give her this. I'll wait."

The Siamese picked up the trinket carefully between two fingers, sniffed, and retreated into the building, closing the door behind him. Several minutes later, he returned and handed the locket back to Korlon. "Madame will see you in a minute," he announced. "If you will step inside." He held the door for Korlon and showed him into a richly decorated living room.

Above the obviously decorative fireplace was a sculpture that Korlon recognized as the work of a famous dead sculptor — one of the few items he had ever seen up-close that could be priced in pounds of gold. The walls were of fine Alophtan pine, carved with intricate reliefs, and the floor was covered by a rug that Korlon thought was also Alophtan, though he wasn't sure. The furniture consisted of two sofas — more pine, by the smell — covered with rich velvet in muted beige colors. Korlon sat down hesitantly on one of them.

On the glass table in front of him sat a marble game board, the pieces set up in a two-player position that gave white the win after four moves. He made the first absently, then removed his hand from the board, studying the game to avoid thinking about Paulette.

He heard her soft step before she said, "White wins in four moves."

"Three," he answered without looking up. Her scent was difficult to catch through the haze of pine — intentionally, no doubt — so he looked toward the other entrance

to the room, from where she had spoken.

Her curves were a little wider and she wore a conservative businessrobe, dark blue with maroon cuffs and sash. Again, Korion was acutely conscious of his threadbare standard-issue blue cotton garment. The biggest shock, though, was not seeing her dressed like a businesscat, but her close-cropped hair.

"So you're back," she said casually though her claws betrayed her nervousness.

"You cut your hair," Korion said idiotically.

"I had to," she replied, wrinkling her eyebrows.

"Is this your house?" he asked.

"Goodness, no," she shook her head. "It belongs to Fern Councillor Swift."

Swift had to be a cheetah. Only they had cute last names. There was an awkward silence of a few minutes as Korion returned his gaze to the game board, not really seeing it.

"Where do you dance now?" Korion asked finally, looking back at her.

"I gave that up. I dance to a different tune, with greater rewards, now." She bent her head, avoiding his eyes.

Korion felt an ache in his chest, remembering her telling him that the dance was its own reward. He turned his head, looking at the reliefs, the game, anything but her in case the impending pressure behind his eyes suddenly embarrassed him.

"You're not the best magician in the world," she said, not accusingly but softly and matter-of-factly.

"No. I live out in the middle of nowhere. Mostly I just spend my time surviving; I don't do a lot of research." He reached out and moved a black piece.

"Oh, Kor," she said, her voice small and scared, "I wish you hadn't come back."

"So do I." He stood, still avoiding looking at her. "Don't worry I won't be back." He started for the exit, but she ran after him, swung him around, and clutched him tightly as though she were holding on to her life or her dreams. He hugged her automatically but their love was gone, and he derived no comfort from it. She stepped back, eyes moist, and looked into his face, but they both knew better than to kiss.

"Good bye, Kor," she said, and ran out of the room.

• • •

He couldn't go back to the other magicians, to the friendly prying eyes that allowed him no privacy, no time to

remember and regret. So he wandered, ignoring the curses of the people he occasionally bumped into, until he looked up and found that his feet had taken him full circle, unconsciously, back to the old ruined bar Wei, there were worse places to end up.

Inside, Trusty sat at a table. His shoulders were hunched over his head, and he was making a wheezing sound that echoed eerily in the emptiness of the bar. Korion sat down across from him and gently touched his shoulder.

"Trusty?"

The hound looked up. "Say, the cat came back."

Korion managed a weak smile. "You said that already."

"What are you, a reporter?" Trusty's eyes were looking at Korion, but he was gazing far beyond the cat.

Korion sighed. He was looking around when Trusty grabbed his shoulder. "No cats allowed!" He attempted to wrench Korion from his seat, but his grip was so pathetically weak that he gave up after only a few seconds and sank back into his seat.

For a moment, they sat in silence, sharing each others' loss. Trusty's wheezing became worse suddenly and he keeled over the table. Korion reached out to hold his head, and Trusty looked straight at him, back in the present. "She was so pretty," he whispered.

Korion stared for a moment then stood, gently laying Trusty's head on the table so he could see around him. Then he gathered some dust from the table and cast it into the air, muttering an invocation as he did so.

In an instant, the bar was alive once more. Bright lights highlighted the shiny wallpaper, cast bizarre shadows across the tables as the waitresses wove skilfully through them. The sound of merry conversation and the scent of satisfied customers filled the air. And on the stage, Paulette shook her long white hair and danced with all her heart and soul.

Trusty looked around, enraptured. He lifted his head and drank in the sights, his nostrils widening to catch the smells, ears perking up to the lively noise. A smile formed on his old, grizzled face and lingered there. "Ahhh," he breathed, satisfied. Then he closed his eyes and lay down his head for the last time.

Korion watched his friend die, and slowly he removed the dogs, the wallpaper, and the lights, until there was only her, dancing on the stage, dancing only for him. He closed his eyes, and when he opened them, she was gone, and there was only the dust, settling slowly to the floor.

"Goodbye, Paulette," he said aloud, and walked out into the light.





By Dean J.



TENDERLOIN

BY NATHANIEL BROGDEN



The first time that I saw her, Felice Parsons sat in a fetal position in my office easy chair, her fox-muzzle buried in a teddy bear her face far wet with tears. Her eyes were squeezed shut and her black-tipped ears were flat against her skull. She was trembling and keening, enduring another flashback of her childhood. I made a point to be with her whenever this happened to help unravel her madness. Some of her flashbacks, you see, were very vivid. I'll start from the beginning.

Felice had what I and other psychiatrists call post-traumatic stress syndrome. Few animal-folk get this malady, since their minds are constructed a little differently from ours, making "critter-shrinks" like myself forever faced with little-researched mental illness.

She was brought to us when a desperate phone call came to the hospital, pleading for help. At the address she gave they found her on the living room floor with blood trickling down her arms. She was treated here for dozens of knife-cuts on her arms and neck and was put in my care.

Felice didn't have any history of substance abuse, but I suspected another form of abuse was at work here. I checked her family history and came across Harold Parsons, Felice's father. He was what I feared, a child abuser who, according to police files, had whipped and knife-scarred Felice for over a year, sometimes even tied her to a chair and left her in the dark for hours. Felice's mother had died at her birthing. Any fool on the street could see that Harold had been taking "revenge" on Felice for the death of his wife. But all of this happened over ten years ago. She was tested by psychiatrists soon after Harold was imprisoned and Felice adopted. She checked out all right.

I delved deeper into this ugly history and discovered a vital clue to her illness. Harold died in prison five years ago. Slashed to death with a sharpened bed-spring by a disgruntled cell-mate. My guess is that she secretly

loved her father in spite of his cruelty to her, such is the inescapable social nature of foxes. And humans. In the deepest pit of her mind she probably blamed her father's death, possibly her mother's death as well, on herself. Her knife-wounds had we had not gotten to her in time, would have gotten deeper and deeper until she died. It occurred to me as I walked to her room that she was, in a very real way, the same frightened little girl now that she was a decade ago.

Felice seemed a little less lean and more relaxed after being in her room for a week. The prescriptions I designed for her worked pretty well. She just sat on her bed, the teddy bear lying limp next to her. In spite of her apparent calmness, there was telltale twitching on her brow; her childhood was being played over and over again in her mind's theater. She smiled weakly as I pulled up a chair.

"Well, how are you feeling today, Felice?"

A slight shrug. "OK. I guess," she answered in a soft, delicate voice. A shy child's voice.

She still trusted me more than the others. If all went well, she would be asking for me to talk to her, which would be a good sign of trust between us. A while before, she would have curled up and scooted away from me. She now stayed put and looked at me most of the time.

"Doctor Morrison?"

I smiled and said, "Please, just call me Henry."

"Henry... what's happened to my arms? Why are they scarred?"

"You don't know who put the scars there?"

She paused and shook her head, looking almost ashamed. Her ears drooped a little.

I leaned back in my chair, being careful to not fold my arms, for that would risk looking like an authority. That

may sound dumb to some people but I had to be Uncle Henry to her, not Doctor Morrison.

She looked at me with tears that grew in little clear pillows around her eye-ribs and said, "Did I do this to me?"

"Yes. I'm afraid you did."

She started to sob. Her hands went over her eyes. That's when I noticed that the walls behind her — I can't say it any other way — *skifted* into different walls. In an instant, everything had changed except the chair I sat in.

"What the hell?" I said out loud. We were in what looked like a barren, dusty attic — looked around me for a moment and when I turned to look at Felice again, — nearly lost bladder control. She was tied up in an elaborate harness of clotheline that kept her bent over with her arms and legs tied together in a rickety wooden chair. She was gagged and crying as profusely as when I first met her.

That's when I heard the heavy stomping of boots coming up the stairs at the far end of the attic. Becoming frightened of that noise, I said "Felice? Who's that?"

When I turned to face her, I was back in her hospital room. She wasn't tied up anymore but still she sobbed, hugging her teddy bear tight. Her eyes were still staring at where the sound of footsteps had come from.

After calming her with soothing reassurances that everything was all right now I made my excuses and left. As I left her room, I found that my cold hands were shaking uncontrollably.

It wasn't too soon before I made a beeline to the newspaper-clippings negatives in her father's police file. I rummaged through all the material, hoping to find some reference to her place of childhood captivity. When I found a photograph of that, I was stunned. Her father's torture chamber was an attic. A bare, dusty attic containing a wooden chair, a kitchen knife and a clotheline harness.

I couldn't tell anyone about this strange encounter. They'd think I was crazy. Worse if I provided evidence via demonstration of her flashbacks. Some government research group might snatch her away. I couldn't let that happen to her. They couldn't help her the way I could. Besides, I seemed to be the only person around that she could open up to.

It was four days after my first encounter with her apparently new ability that I got caught up in another trip down her memory lane. I was prepared this time, as prepared as anyone could be, I guess. I had a mini-tape-recorder running in my coat-pocket, to provide evidence that her "imps" were not just me going crazy (I hoped). I also had a theory about how much control Felice had over these flashbacks. This theory of mine had led me to keep a little surprise in my coat pocket.

We greeted each other in her room like old friends at a

cavera. She parted the space beside her on the bed, inviting me to sit. I obliged, noticing the loving look she kept giving me.

Giving me a quick nuzzle on the neck with her snuzzle, she said "So, how's my progress so far?"

"Well, you're doing all right. You're a lot more stable than you were under a week ago, a little less emotional."

"Well, I guess I am a little less wired. I'm able not to cry so much, at least." She sighed and wrapped an arm around me. "I like you a lot, Henry. It's not just because you've been helping me, but because you're nice. You feel right to me. That might not make sense to you..."

I coughed nervously. "Oh, believe me, that makes a lot of sense. Felice? Do you remember what happened at our last talk?"

With her hand on my leg, she replied "Yeah, we talked about..." She frowned, then brightened. "...the scars on my arms! Did we talk about anything else?"

As I feared, she was still subconsciously trying to deny her memory. Preparing for the worst, I said "I asked you who it was that was stomping up the stairs."

"Stairs?" she queried, sliding her arm away from me. "I... I remember something..."

She got a vacant look in her eyes and the scenery shifted again. I fell on my butt, since the bed had disappeared. When I stood up and looked at her she was back in her chair and harness, scared and gagged. A kitchen knife was stuck in the floor under the chair. We were back in Daddy's attic.

I looked expectantly at the stairs and hoped that the recorder was picking up the heavy clomping footfalls of Harold Parsors. His pointed-ear shadow crept up the wall as he approached.

"Felice?" he growled as he came into view. My god he was big. "It's time for the belt again." He stopped abruptly at the top of the stairs and looked at me with seething-hate eyes. "Who the hell are you?"

I took a quick glance at Felice. She was looking at me. "Was she in control of all this?" The surprise in my pocket pressed into my side reassuringly.

Harold strode across the attic towards us as he took off his belt, readying for another "session" with his daughter. I stood between them, defiant but not sure of anything. A question kept nagging me — who needed the protecting, me or her?

I'm not a good fighter and it showed painfully in just under three seconds. That belt of his swung up and smacked me across the face, while his right foot thudded into my groin.

The shock of so much pain from north and south made me buckle over.

"Now that I've got your attention, asshole, tell me what you're doing here."

As my hands covered my aching balls, I stared at Felice the look on my face saying, "Can't you see what's happening?" She started to whimper eyes now wide with shock. Was I getting to her? Was she even less in control than I had surmised?

As I tried to recover from Harold's blows, what felt like a hammer banged down on the back of my head. My knees caved in and I flopped to the floor. I could hear her muffled "Mmmmm" from under her gag. She was pulling against her ropes, trying to break free. But after a moment of struggling, it seemed that she couldn't (wouldn't?) help me.

Trying to shake off my dizziness, I reached into my pocket and pulled out my surprise: a hypodermic with 11 cc of a heavy-duty animal sedative, a mixture of 0.5 cc of Acepromazine and 10.5 cc of Ketamine. This was the most powerful morph knock-out drug in the hospital. She'd be out instantly and, I hoped, we'd return home. But not if Harold stopped me.

"Felice. I heard him scold. You cheap little tenderloin, you brought him here, didn't you? Was he going to take you away from me? Uh-uh." He chuckled as he kneaded the creaking leather belt. "You're mine, little bitch. Forever." She stopped struggling and, with flattened ears, braced herself for the blows. It was then that I realized how she had gotten all those scars in the past five years.

I quickly grabbed her arm with one hand, the needle in the other. Harold moved in a blur and caught my needle-hand before I could give her the injection. He yowled, and it took a second before I noticed that the needle had plunged into his hand. The pressure of the impact had forced the drug into him.

Harold winced as he pushed me away, pressing his injured hand into his chest, dropping the belt. As he plucked out the hypo, he glared at me. I was sure he'd attack, but his glare softened as the mixture coursed through his veins. A moment later, he crashed to the floor. We stared at him for a moment, then I got up and untied Felice.

She was wide-eyed and silent as I propped Harold in the chair and then led him up. Better safe than sorry after all. As I stood back to examine my handiwork, it dawned on me that I had handled a warm and solid being. In that calm moment, I asked myself some questions. How could Felice let him hit me like that, if she was in control of the scenario? Did she care what happened to her or even me? And the most disturbing question brought a shiver. Would Daddy take revenge on both of us once he came to? But if he was created by Felice, why didn't she just —

"You son of a bitch!" she screeched as she punched Harold between the eyes, knocking him over backwards.

the back of the chair clunking to the floor.

Even in his drag-sleep he moaned with pain. When she moved to the side of the chair, I could see tears trickling down her cheeks, her black lips turned almost straight down. Felice started to kick him so hard I could hear ribs cracking.

As much as I hated Harold, whatever he was, I couldn't stand to see him being beaten like that. Also, Felice's reaction to his helpless position surprised me. Maybe it shouldn't have. After all, there must have been an huge amount of pent-up rage from her awful childhood that made her take revenge when she finally had the chance. But why didn't she do this earlier? The answer was simple even in this surrealistic universe. She needed outside help, my knocking him out, for her to take action. The fury on her face as she drove her foot into Harold's gut made me wonder if she changed for the better, or simply changed.

"Felice!" I yelled as I took hold of her shoulders. "Stop it! He's had enough!"

She shot me a look of pure blood-fury as she growled, "He'll never have enough."

"Please Felice. Trust me there's no need for this. You got back at him. You're free."

She looked down at the moaning, sleeping creature that coughed up spatters of blood and nodded at me, her fury slowly subsiding. But there was still an edge in her voice as she said to no one, "Yes, I am."

She moved away from me as I took my hands off her. I relaxed and looked away. Before I could react, she picked up the knife from the floor and lunged at Harold, shoving it into his chest up to the hilt with a meaty thunk. The green in her eyes was that of vengeful abstraction.

With that, the attic and all of its contents, including Harold, faded out and was simultaneously replaced by her bedroom. Excusing herself, she went to the bathroom. As I stood alone listening to the recording I made, I realized that I had succeeded in getting Felice past her self-destructiveness. Once her father died, in every sense of the word, there was nothing left to torture her. She would leave the hospital soon, quite able to handle the real world, no longer an apparent threat to herself or society. Morph's ways seemed to heal faster mentally than burns when placed in hospitals or equally safe environments.

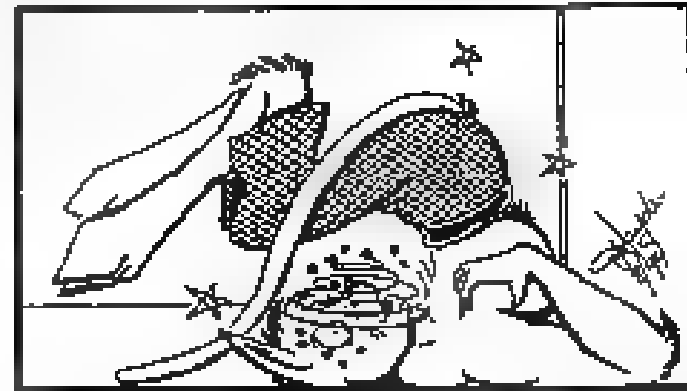
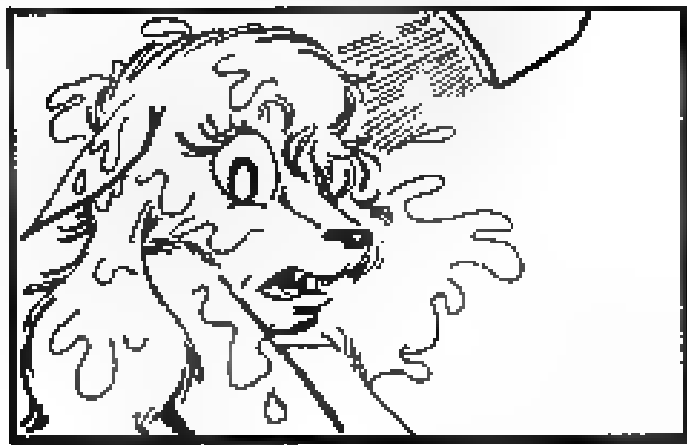
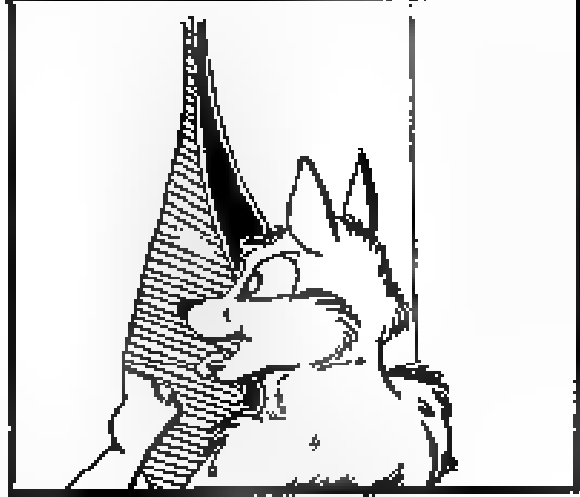
I couldn't help but marvel at the subtle change in her manner however. She was meaner now, more hard-edged. Would she a better person for it? Or would she like so many victims of child abuse, wring her frustrations out on children of her own? Would they become her "tenderloin" to torture? Even a professional psychiatrist like myself couldn't begin to guess. With a fox-morph like Felice Parsons, there might never be an answer. ❖

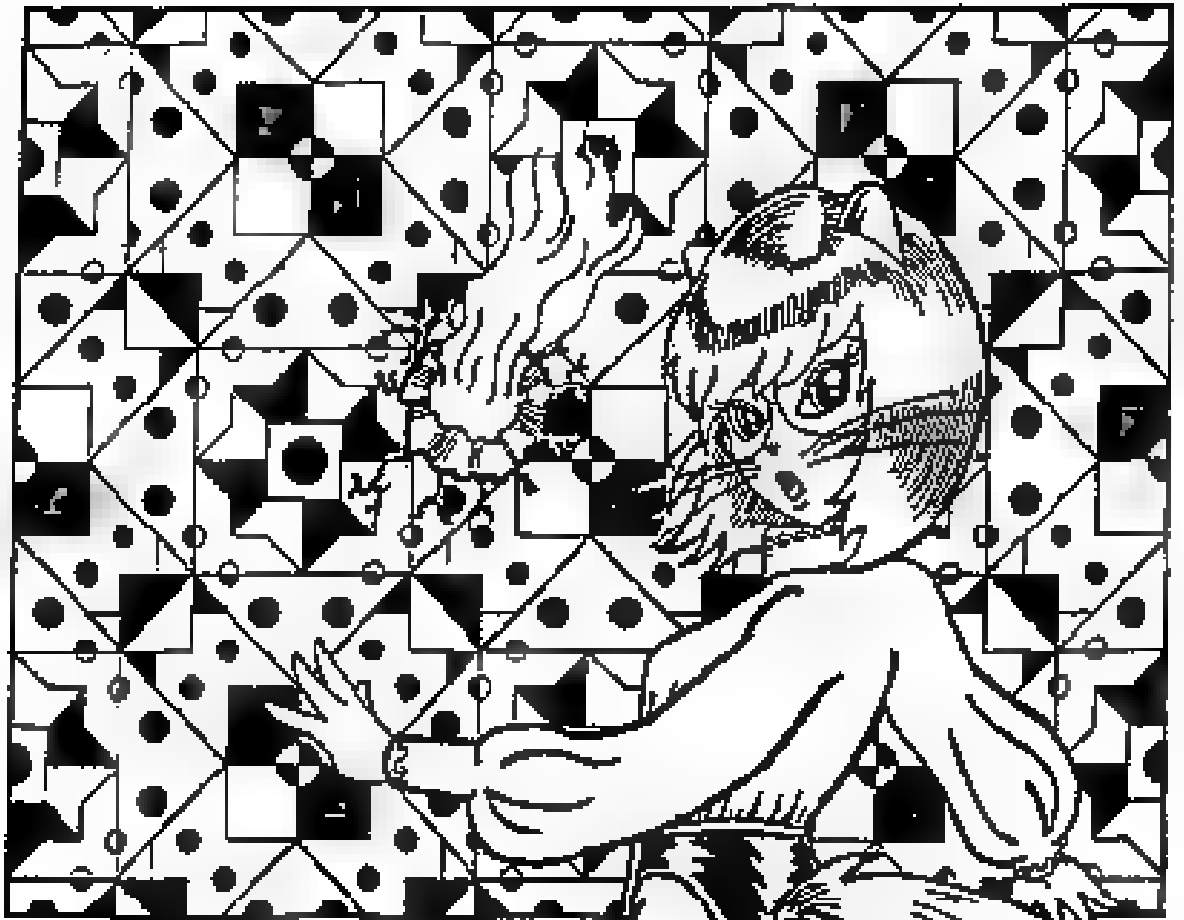


HAPPY
HOLIDAYS

© 1993
THE REINDEER REMOVAL

"THE PRICE OF ADMISSION"





PHIL 92

"Pheidae"

NITROCOON

"DRAGON NIGHT"

STORY BY MEL





"YOROSHIKU ONEGA SHIMASU"

IT MEANS
"PLEASED TO MEET YOU",
IN MY LANGUAGE

PG. 40
© 1995 JAPAN
2011 12 15



MY VILLAGE IS
NOT FAR FROM HERE.

THERE IS A
BAR WHERE WE
CAN STOP AND TALK



ICHIRO, WHY ARE
YOU DRESSED THAT WAY?

IAMA RONIN.

LOUIS - A MARRIAGE
SABOTEUR. 21/11



THERE IS MY
VILLAGE











来、皆来、来
SAI, MINA SAU, ISHIOU
来、皆来、来
"EHABA" O UTAHAI
COME, EVERYONE
SING "EHABA"
WITH ME.



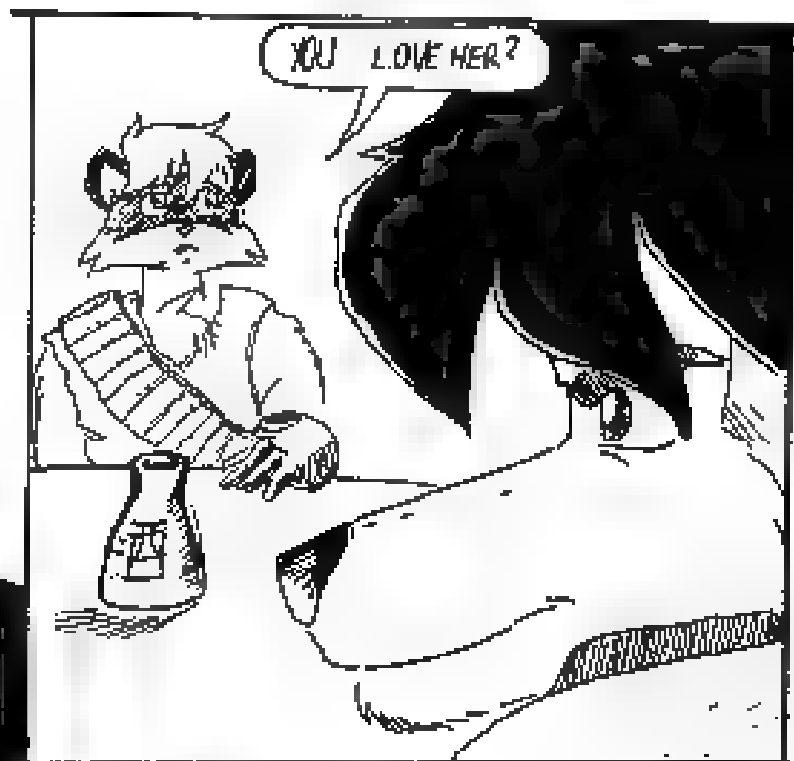
EHABA, EHABA,
NARU YO NIARU DABA



SOBA O MI-AGERYA
AOTENTU



KIRINAI, KIRINAI
HATE GAMA





ALL LOVE ERIC



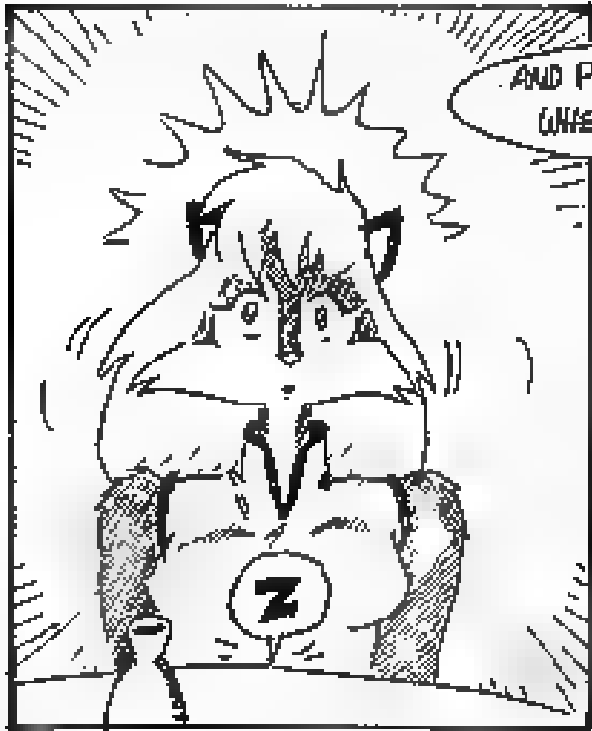
THE SUN RISES WHEN SHE AWAKENS



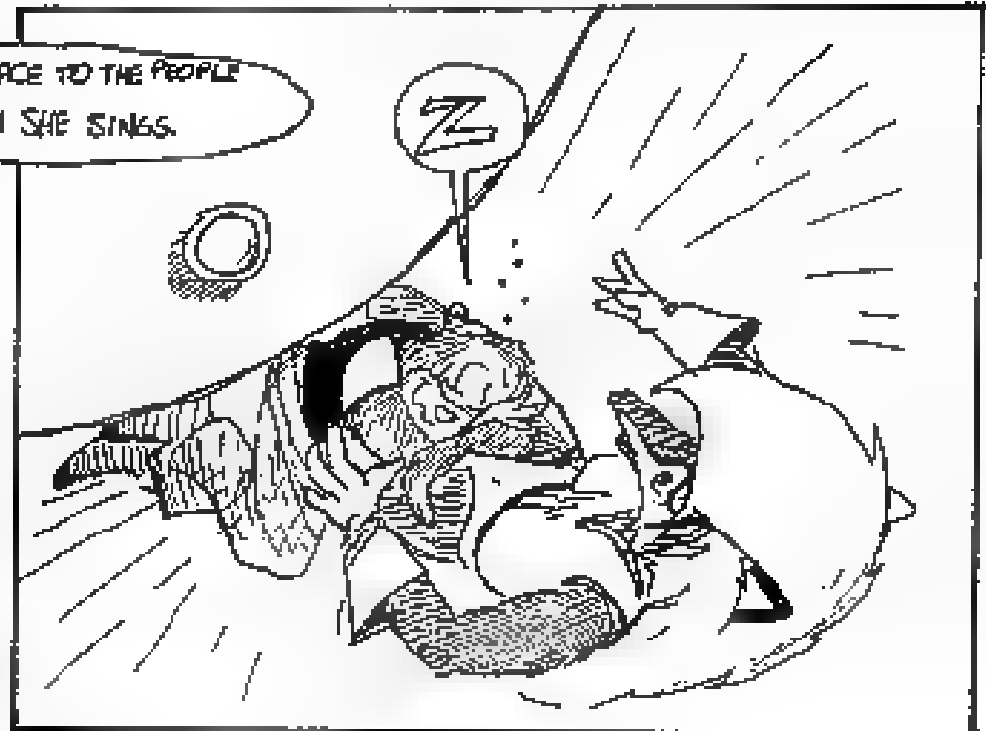
surp!



bank!

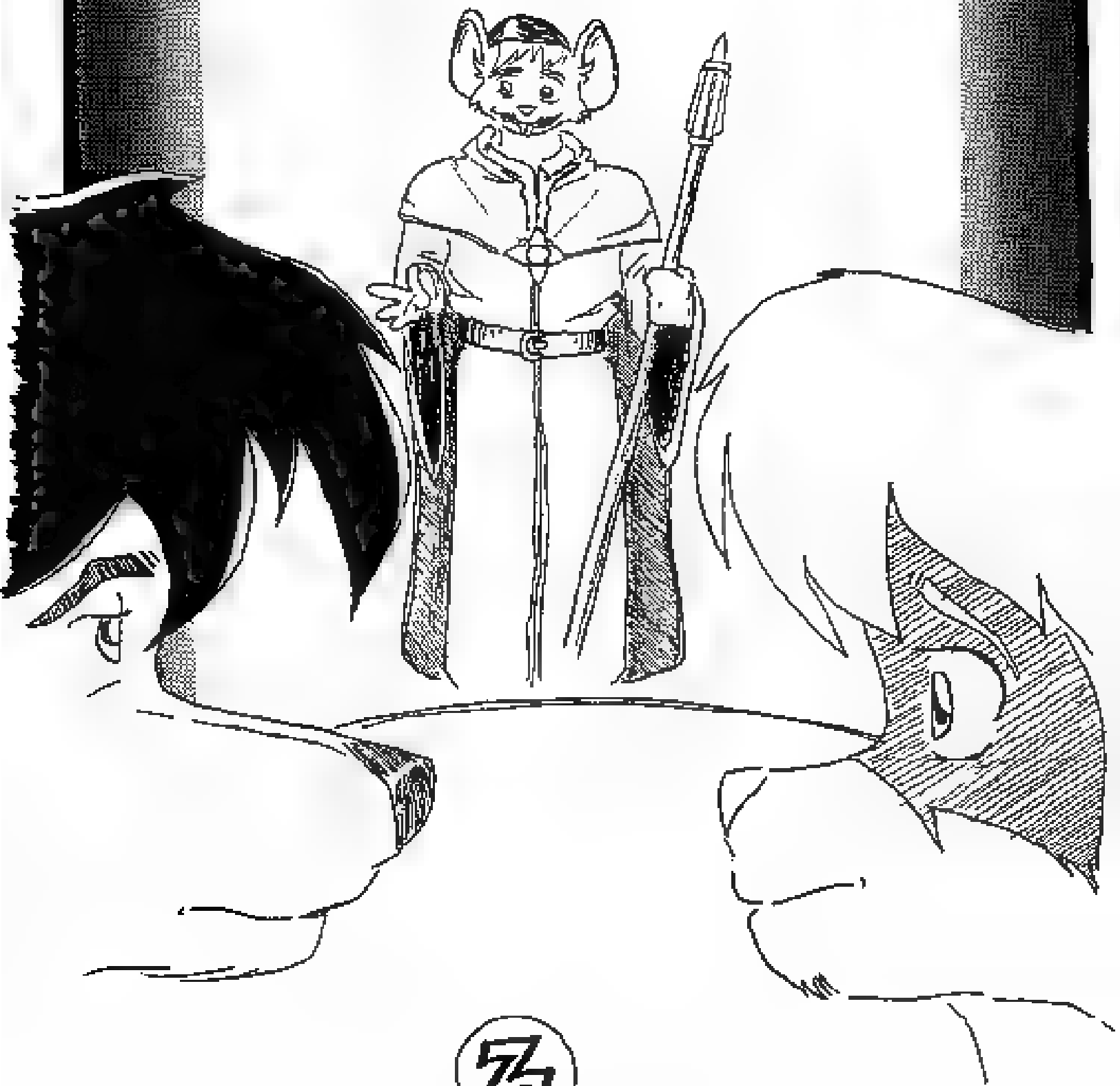


AND PERCE TO THE PEOPLE WHEN SHE SINGS.





I AM *ARIND*, HEALER OF THE WOUNDED.
I OVERHEARD YOUR PLANS TO DEFEAT
TERKAA, AND I WISH TO JOIN YOU



76



ever seen. It certainly wasn't any air elemental! At least seven feet tall and hugely muscled, it could have been called a tiger. Except tigers rarely had nine-inch long lower fangs, or jet-black eyes. Or two tails. Jarith blinked. Make that tigresses. She sported two sets of breasts, a rather generously endowed upper set and a more moderate set just below the first pair. Even as the alarm bells began to ring in the back of Jarith's mind, her eyes locked with his. Jarith whimpered.

"Are you the one who dares summon me?" Somehow, she managed to make a bass voice sound female.

"M-m-meee?" Jarith squeaked.

The daemonesse frowned and gestured peremptorily. Jarith suddenly found himself standing in front of her. His nose came to just below her ribcage. "Yes, you, little mortal."

"W-w-well, yes. I mean, not Er... wh... sort of?"

The frown deepened. "Which is it, then? Did you or did you not perform the summoning?"

Jarith gulped. "Uhhhh. I did perform a summoning, but it was to summon a minor air elemental! Certainly I never intended to summon anything like you! Whatever you are, or are'acn?"

She glared at him, and Jarith swore he could feel his fur begin to scoulder. "The incantation to summon me is very specific. While its basic components are like any other summoning spell, even a fool couldn't miss the variances in intonation."

The mouse shivered. "I promise you! The spell was supposed to be for minor air elementals! It's in the book!" he waved toward the table.

The tigress-daemon snapped her fingers, and the book was in her hand. The pages turned, unaided, and then stopped. She peered at the page, then squinted a bit. A slow smile spread across her face, and she began to chuckle. "It would seem you have fallen victim to a spelling error... of sorts."

Jarith stared at her. "What do you mean?"

She held the book out for him to see. It looked the same as before. She muttered something, and the page shifted minutely. Jarith was horrified to see the two accents he had "missed" earlier disappear. "Your book has been tampered with magically." There was grim amusement in her voice.

Jarith slumped despondently. He was caught. Meaningfully or not, he had summoned her. And he knew without a doubt that she was far beyond his meagre powers to control. "What is your price?" he whispered.

Daemonic laughter boomed, rebounded from his walls, shaking dust from his ceiling. "My, you're quick to give in! Most often they make all sorts of pitiful threats or pleas. What kind of a mage are you?"

"I'm not," he sighed. "I'm an apprentice. That's why I was practising the summoning I kept getting, or distracted. That's why I didn't notice the change in the spell book." Anger flashed in him for a moment. "Who would want to do that to me?"

The tigress nodded. "Indeed. Simple enough to divine, though." She held up a hand, palm up, and murmured a string of words. With a soft pop, the image of a tiny wolf appeared in her hand. Jarith recognised it instantly as one of the older students, one whom he had been vying with for Merry's attention. It was only when the figure whirled, looked into the daemonesse's face, and collapsed with a tiny scream, that Jarith realised that it was no image. She picked up the limp form by the scruff of the neck, between her thumb and forefinger. "Why would he want to do this to you? Did you bed his woman?"

Ears flushing furiously, whiskers twitching with embarrassment, he replied, "No. He and I are both interested in the same girl."

"Ah. I see. This wouldn't happen to be the 'distraction' you mentioned earlier, would it?"

Jarith's embarrassment deepened. "Ahh. yes."

She nodded, amusement sparkling in the black depths of her eyes. Still carrying the inert miniature wolf, she walked over and sprawled on his bed. It groaned under her weight. "You asked about my price. Usually, a service of some sort is performed before I exact my price. Do you have anything in mind?"

He stared at her, nonplused. "A service?"

She nodded again. "Perhaps vengeance upon this pitiful worm?" she nuzzled the unconscious wolf, running her tongue over him. "He doesn't taste too bad. I could eat him like this, just as a minor favour to you."

"No!" Jarith was horrified. "I mean, sure, he pulled a vile trick on me, but I couldn't just kill him!"

A wicked grin crossed her face. "But it'd be me eating him."

Jarith glared. "It'd be the same thing."

"Hmmm... perhaps you'd like to have your lady friend?" She motioned, and Merry was in his arms. The ring-tailed cat was completely nude, and staring at him with huge, frightened eyes.

"Jarith," she mewled, "please, what's going on?"

The tigress waved nonchalantly. "I could even have her just after you, begging to fulfil your every fantasy." Suddenly, Merry's expression changed, became something sultry and hungry. She wrapped her arms around his neck and rubbed against him, her body soft and sleek and warm against his. Jarith stared at her, mouth working silently. Every dream, fantasy, desire he had ever had about Merry boiled to the surface. She smiled at him with half-lidded eyes and slowly ran her tongue over

his muzzle. Her scent filled his nostrils. She ran a hand down her body and cupped a breast, gently teasing the nipple. The mouse shivered.

"No," Jarith whispered.

The damoness arched an eyebrow. "Hmmm?"

"No," he stated, a little louder this time, his voice somewhat strained. "Much as I want Merry I don't want her like this. Not this way." He gently strove pushed the little cat away. "Please, put her back the way you found her, where you found her." Merry vanished as she had appeared, with a flick of the tigress' wrist. Jarith slumped suddenly feeling rather weak in the knees. "Please... there's nothing I want."

Suddenly he was kneeling at the damoness' feet. She smiled down at him, mischief gleaming in her eyes. "Oh yes, there is something you want, little mouse. Two things, in fact. And I grant them. Now there's only the payment to extract." Jarith looked confused and a little frightened. "Don't worry," she purred. "You'll like your... gifts. Now we'll take our due and be gone."

"We?" he squeaked. He felt something touch his knees. Looking down, he could see two black-furred hands protruding from the floor, resting on his knees. As he watched, a head grew out of the floor between the hands. A neck and torso followed. The back she hell-cat

smiled at him with acid green eyes. Even as he looked up to the tigress demon, he could feel another hell-cat flowing up out of the floor behind him. Powerful arms wrapped around his chest, and a tongue like liquid fire caressed the inside of his ear. When his eyes met the damoness her muzzle was inches from his. She smelled of brimstone and truck.

"We haven't had a toy mouse in a long, long time," she purred. His clothes dissolved with a gesture.

Jarith closed his eyes when he felt the muzzle press between his legs.

* * *

Jarith woke with a start, heart pounding. Someone held him tightly, showering his cheeks and muzzle with kisses. Terror gripped him as he forced open his eyes.

Merry... she was ecstatic, babbling, "You saved me! You could have done anything you wanted, had me any way you wanted! But you sent me away and banished that horrible woman!! by yourself!! Oh! You're wonderful! And gallant! Oh, Jarith!" She flung her arms around him and lay her head against his chest.

Jarith held her to him gently, the warmth of her nameless buoying him up as he stroked her back.

It was one spelling mistake that he never regretted. ☉





Plastique Paradise
and a C-4 Solution
page 54



"HELLHEART"

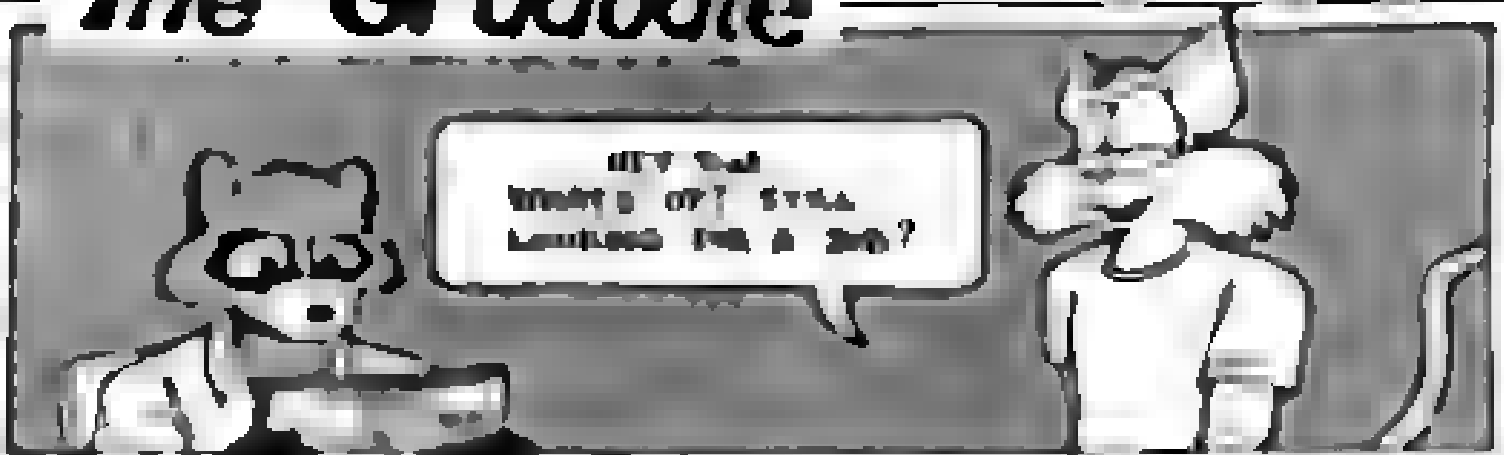
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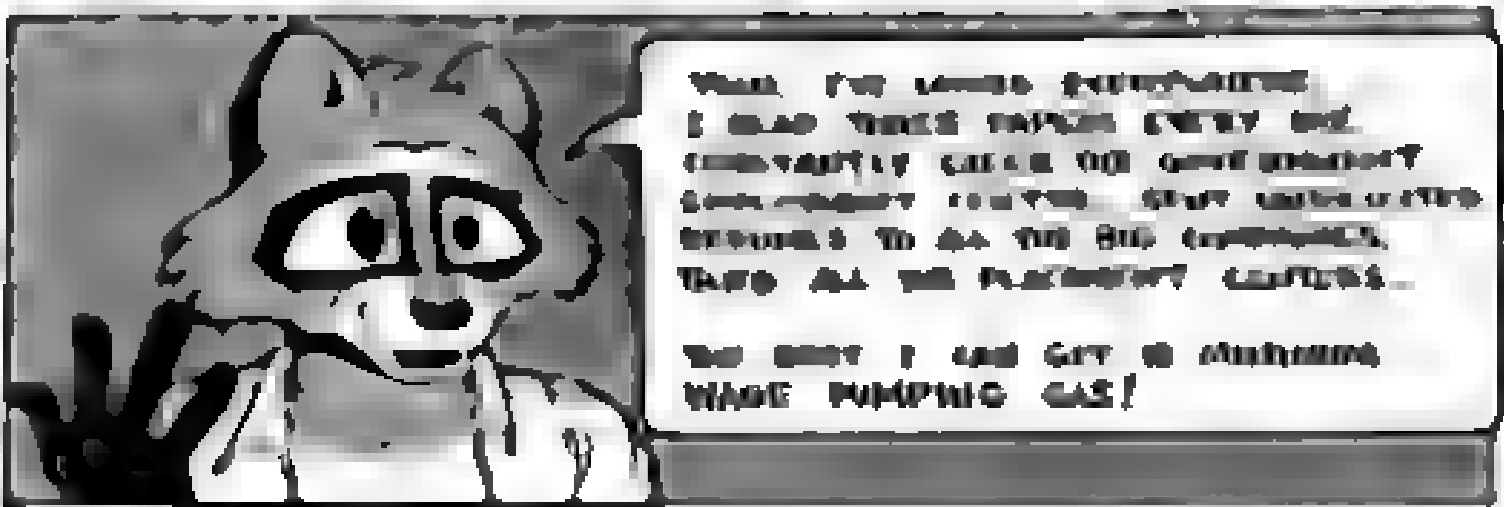


Bill
FHS 94

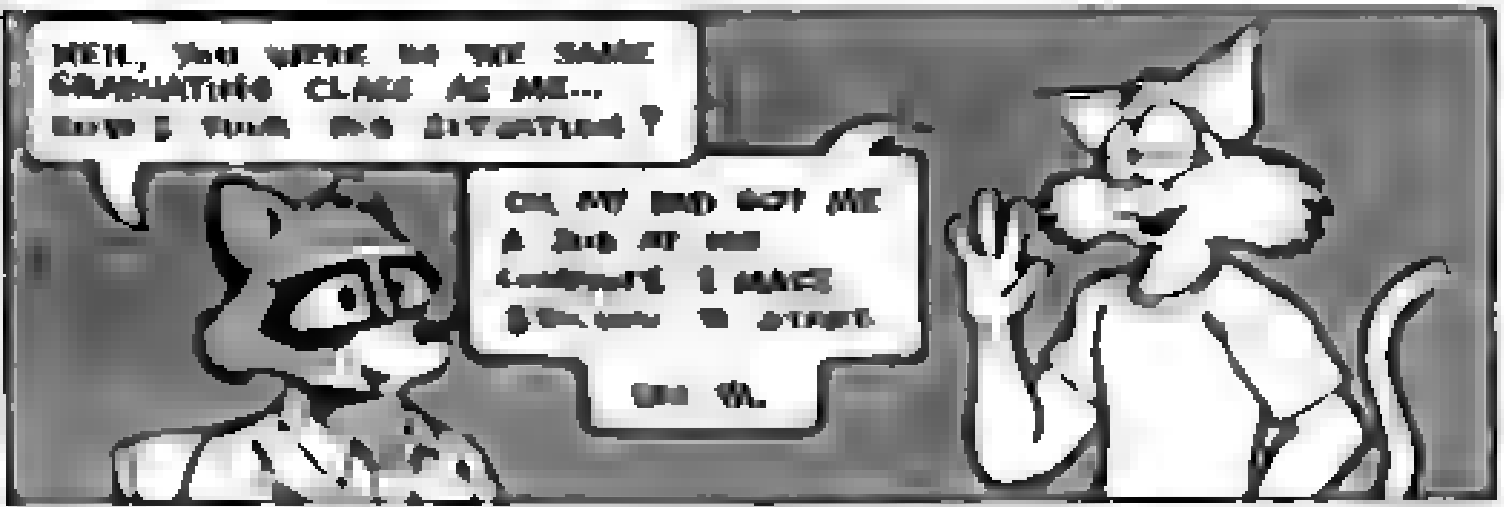
The Graduate



HEY CAT
WHAT'S UP? STILL
LOOKING FOR A JOB?



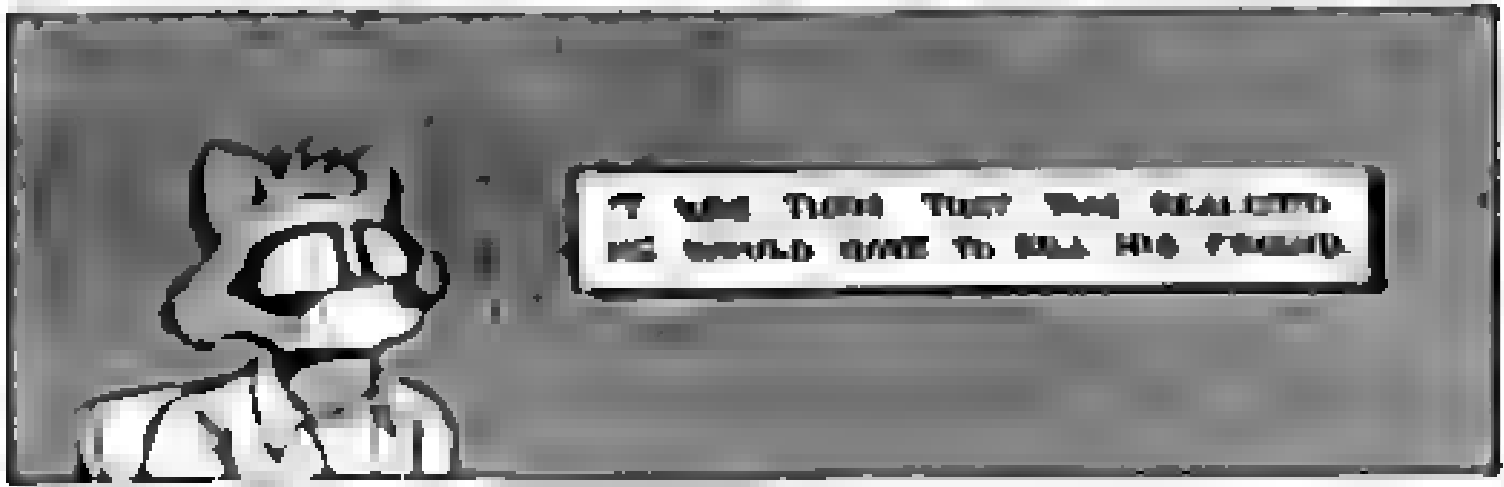
WELL, FOR LONGER PERIODS
I HAD THIS THING EVERY ONE
CONSTANTLY CALLS THE GOVERNMENT
EMPLOYMENT CENTER. BUT UNFORTUNATELY
BEHIND TO DO THE JOB OFFERED,
THAT IS THE PROBLEM...
THE ONLY I CAN GET IS CHEAP
WAGE PUMPING GAS!



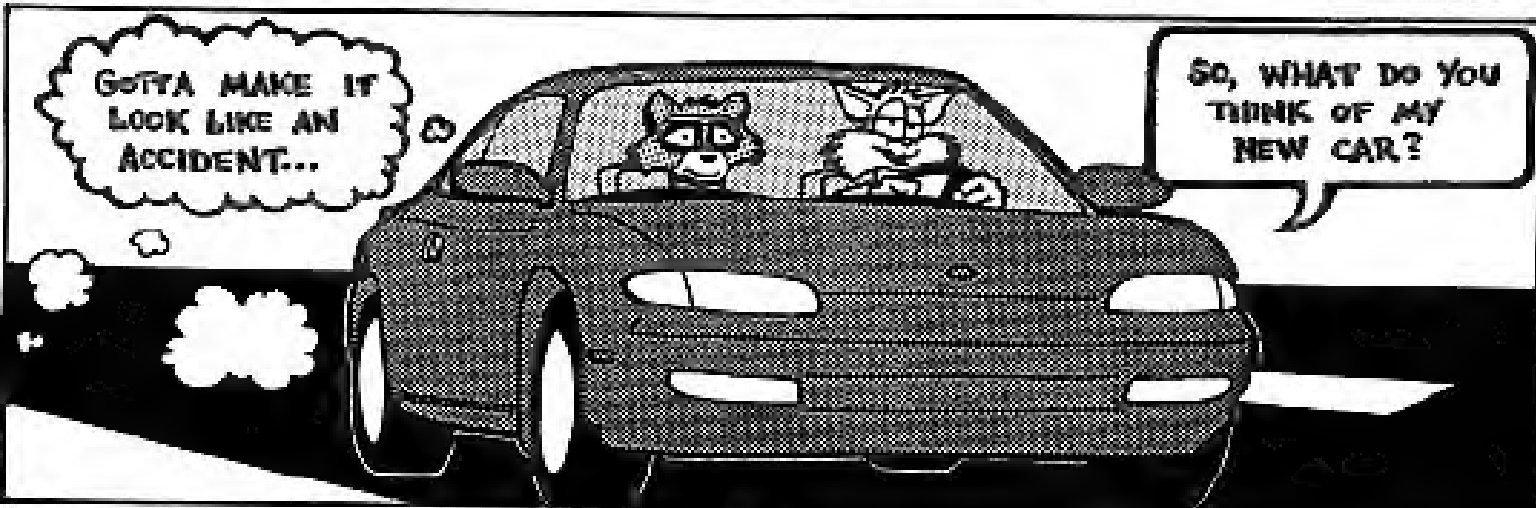
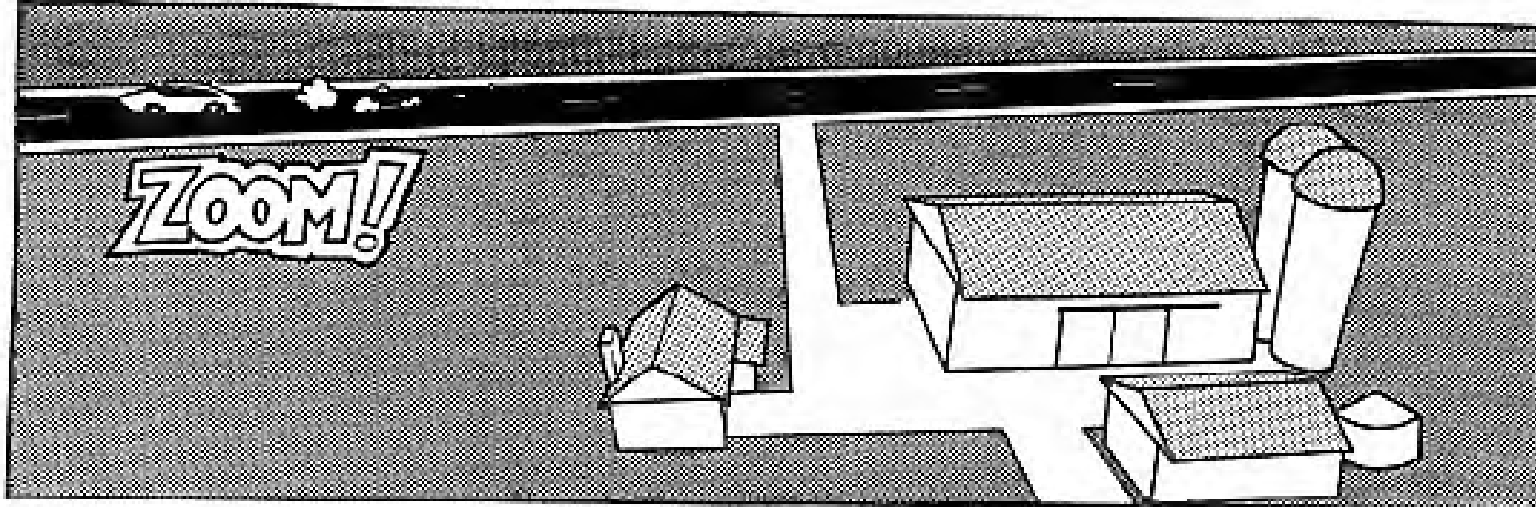
WELL, YOU WERE IN THE SAME
GRADUATING CLASS AS ME...
HOW'S YOUR JOB SITUATION?

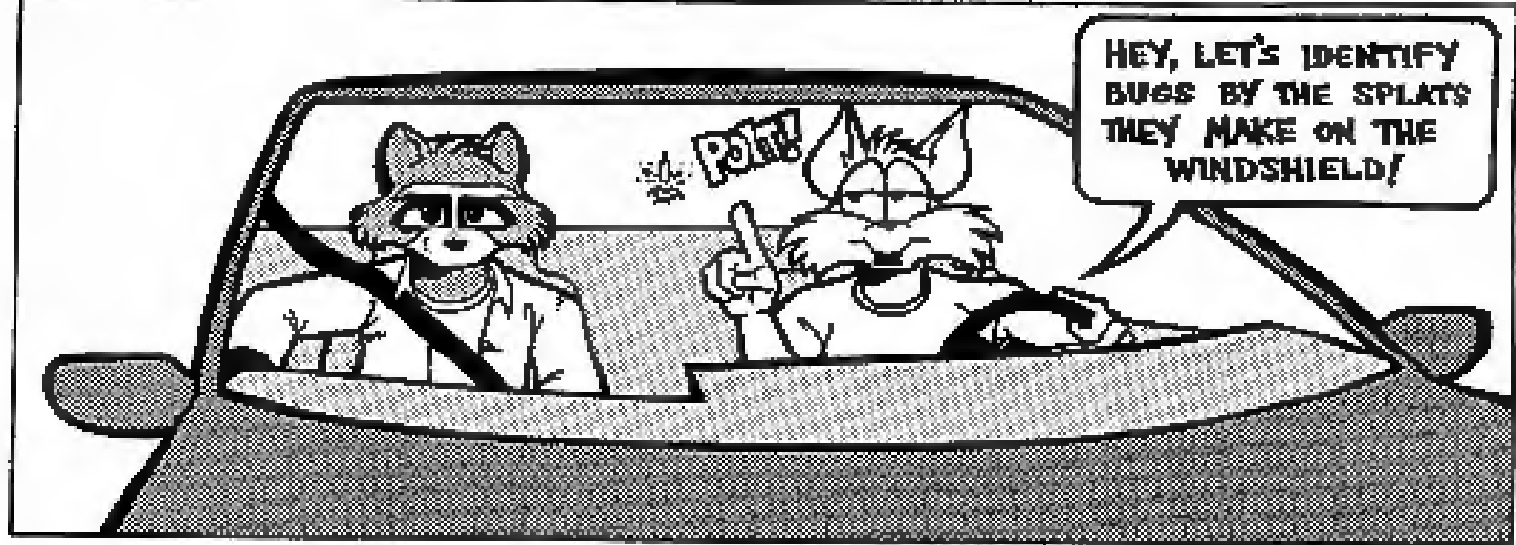
OH, MY DAD GOT ME
A JOB AT THE
CONCRETE & PAVE
SOLUTIONS & STAFF.

OH YA.



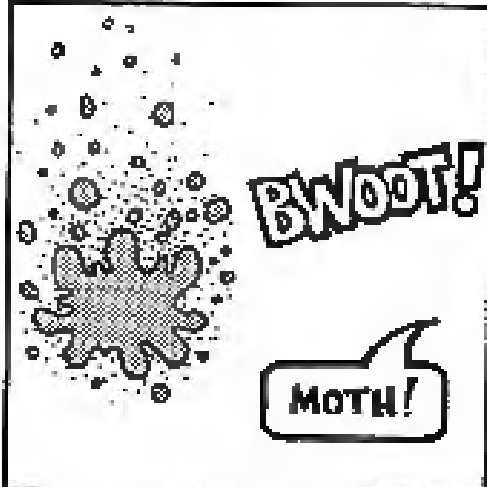
IT WAS THEN THAT THE REALITY
HE WOULD HAVE TO CALL HIS FRIENDS.





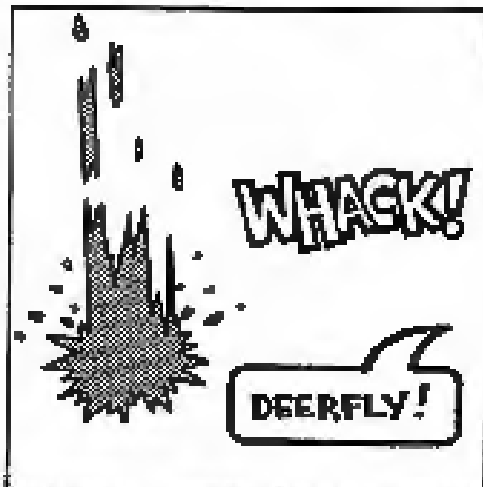
HEY, LET'S IDENTIFY BUGS BY THE SPLATS THEY MAKE ON THE WINDSHIELD!

PIT!



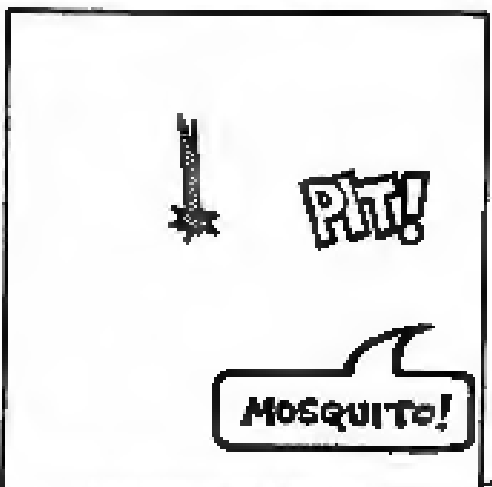
BWOOT!

MOTH!



WHACK!

DEERFLY!



PIT!

MOSQUITO!

BOOM!



NITRO BUG.

HELLO, ARMED CITIZENS!
 TODAY, WE'LL DISCUSS A
 PROBLEM THAT TRIPS UP
 MORE SHOOTISTS THAN
 ANY OTHER! NAMELY,
**HOW TO GET
 RID OF THE
 BODY**

AFTER YOU'VE SHOT SOME
 ONE (WHO NO DOUBT ASKED
 FOR IT.)



A NOTED PSYCOPATH.

FOR THE CARNIVORES AMONG
 YOU, THIS IS NO PROBLEM.

EAT TH' EASILY IDENTIFIABLE
 PARTS FIRST-HEAD, HANDS -
 CUT UP TH' REST INTO
 CHOPS FOR
 TH' FREEZER!



YOU HEARDRES CAN TRY
 THE OLD MAFIA METHODS,
 LIKE DUMPING THE STIFF
 IN THE RIVER, OR BURY IT
 IN YOUR BACK YARD.



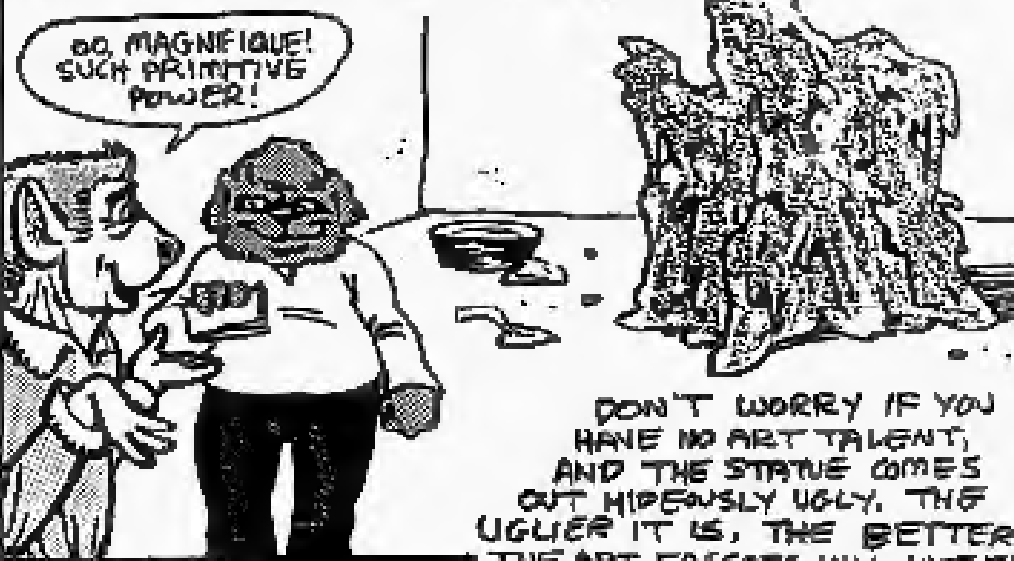
BUT A LOT OF SHOOTINGS
 HAPPEN IN URBAN AREAS
 WITH NO RIVERS OR BACK
 YARDS. IN THESE CASES,
 MORE CREATIVE METHODS
 MUST BE USED.

ONE OF MY FAVORITE DISPOSAL
 METHODS IS TO STUFFING THE
 CORPSE IN A BOX AND MAILING
 IT TO SOMEONE I DISLIKE.



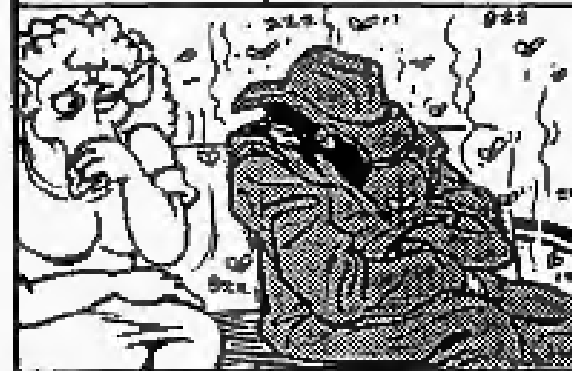
USING THE RETURN ADDRESS OF
 SOMEONE ELSE I DISLIKE, NATCH!

ANOTHER FUN METHOD IS TO GET A BAG OF CEMENT AND
 CASTING THE STIFF INTO A CONCRETE STATUE. THEN
 SELL IT TO SOME ART SNOB!



DON'T WORRY IF YOU
 HAVE NO ART TALENT,
 AND THE STATUE COMES
 OUT HIDEENSLY UGLY. THE
 UGLIER IT IS, THE BETTER
 THE ART FAGGOTS WILL LIKE IT!

YOU COULD ALSO DRESS THE STIFF
 IN BULKY CLOTHES, AND LEAVE
 IT IN THE WAITING ROOM OF
 YOUR LEAST FAVORITE DOCTOR.



THE WAY MOST CLINICS ARE
 UNDERSTAFFED & OVERCROWDED,
 IT COULD GO UNDISCOVERED
 FOR SEVERAL DAYS!

IF YOU HAVE A REALLY
 TALL SKYSCRAPER IN THE
 NEIGHBOURHOOD, YOU COULD
 TOSS THE STIFF OFF OF IT.



A BODY THAT FALLS A
 COUPLE THOUSAND FEET
 LIQUEFIES ON IMPACT.
 RENDERS IT UNIDENTIFIABLE!

CITIZENS WHO KILL IN SELF-
 DEFENSE ARE ROUTINELY PUT
 THRU HELL BY THE LEGAL SYSTEM.
 I HOPE THIS SHORT GUIDE WILL
 BE OF HELP TO YOU WHO WISH
 TO AVOID THIS, AND CLEAN
 UP YOUR OWN MESS. JUST
 USE A LITTLE IMAGINATION
 -AND DON'T GET TOO COCKY!





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YARF!

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