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YARF!

THE • JOURNAL • OF • APPLIED • ANTHROPOMORPHICS



YARF!

THE · JOURNAL · OF · APPLIED · ANTHROPOMORPHICS

Needs You

...or at least your stories and art!

We're looking for fiction, essays, and artwork — especially comic strips, spot art and filler illustrations, and cover art.

...And remember, "anthropomorphic" doesn't just mean "funny animals" or "furries"—nearly anything can be anthropomorphized!

Submission Guidelines

- In general, we ask that material submitted to *Yarf!* be original works (not previously or simultaneously published elsewhere). Exceptions, especially older or more obscure material, will be considered on a case-by-case basis.
- For artwork of any sort, please send quality reproductions (no originals, please), with a margin of 1/2" on all sides. Cover art should be roughly square and at least 7 1/2" wide. *We encourage artists to send us existing unpublished material that our readers would otherwise never see as well as new artwork.*
- If possible, stories and articles should be sent on a 3 1/2" computer disk. This saves us a great deal of re-typing. Any common Macintosh or IBM word processing format is acceptable.
- This is *not* an X-rated 'zine. Material of an overtly sexual or gratuitously violent nature is not accepted. While *Yarf!* is certainly not a "children's magazine", we don't want to worry about who reads it. MPAA movie ratings seem to be an accepted means of defining content; we prefer G-, PG-, or R-rated material.
- Remember, we exercise editorial prerogatives. Not all material we receive will be accepted, and we may ask that changes be made to a submission before publication. We are, after all, not an APA — we are a magazine... people pay good money for this, and we want *Yarf!* to be the best it can possibly be.

Send your submissions to...
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• Roz Gibson •

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Bryce Nakagawa • Fred Patten

Roy Pounds • Lance Rund

While we do our best to put *Yarf!* out on a regular basis, please remember that it is produced in the staff's spare time, and is not a professional publication. Occasional delays are inevitable.

YARF!

THE • JOURNAL • OF • APPLIED • ANTHROPOMORPHICS

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Subscriptions are available at the rate of \$45.00 for eight issues (please see "Flaming Hairballs" for details). Back issues are available; please write for prices.

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FLAMING HAIRBALLS

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

Ah, the holidays... don't you just love 'em? Like many other things, they have a habit of getting in the way of life, but what the hell. Well, because of the holidays, sickness, family obligations, conventions coming earlier than usual, et cetera — ha! Caught ya off guard! Thought we were gonna tell ya why *Yarf!* is late or something, eh? Not a chance. Not only is this, our fifth anniversary issue, on time, it's *ahead* of schedule, and larger than usual to boot. We've even managed to get out a special supplement for all of you to enjoy: *The Yarf! Anthropomorphic Bibliography*, compiled by Fred Patten.

It's hard to believe that we've published *Yarf!* for five years now. In that time, many have wondered about our... ahem... unusual choices in titles. So let's take a trip down memory lane, back to 1989 and a party held in the wilds of Santa Clara County, California. Conversation turned to the lack of a regular anthroazine and thence to the question of what to call such a 'zine. More names than one could shake a stick at tumbled out. The best name had to be short and distinctive and couldn't contain "Fur—" anything or anything "-fur", as the idea was to encourage as many different uses of anthropomorphics as possible. A couple of suggestions *everyone* felt had to be used somehow: "The Journal of Applied Anthropomorphics" and "Flaming Hairballs". The name "*Yarf!*" seemed to come, like the Lorelei, out of nowhere — though Kris Kreutzman had used it a couple of years before on a drawing of Robert and Katrina. (Others insisted that our host's dog suggested the name.) And that's the way it was.

And now — back to the future! This year will see the conclusion to *Empires: Ace of Spades*, though there will be some follow-up stories by Chris Grant and others to keep you all going. We hope to have the next installments of

In Our Image from Watts Martin, along with many more illustrations to go with it. We're also trying to stay in touch with James Charles Lynn, author of the *Arisa* stories; some assistance would be of help here, as James is hard to keep track of. There's also much more zany stuff from Dave Claerhout. (*Boom!*) Dave White (chief of the Exchequer) has talked of a completely rewritten *Nightfighters*. And, of course, there'll more of all the assorted craziness that we hope you've come to expect.

Another couple of questions we get are, "What do you guys get from putting this thing out?" and, "Just what do you guys do in real life, anyway?" Well, *Yarf!* is a labor of love. None of the staff is paid for working on it, other than getting contributor issues and meeting many of you at conventions, through the mails (both snail mail and E-mail), or on the phone.

As for who does what: Dave White collects the mail and keeps the banking stuff up to date. Dave Peyton will help us keep up with our contributors — a never-ending job — and will try to let folks know that we have received their contributions and whether or when we will be using them. Kris keeps up with the subscriptions, keeping our subscriber and contributor databases. (And, as if there aren't enough Daves to remember...) Dave Bryant formats the stories for publication and specifies each issue's typography. Jeff, as Editor/Publisher, keeps track of everybody, mails current and back issues, and answers many of the inquiries we receive.

We also get help from many of our contributors and subscribers. Most notable in this effort are Monika Livingstone and Gerald Perkins, Monika for just keeping us all moving in the right direction and Gerald for helping to look over some of the stories that come in.

Freefall by Mark Stanley



We all have real jobs, which tend to take time that some folks seem to think we should lavish on *Yarf!* Kris Kreutzman is a software quality engineer at Apple Computer, Inc. Dave White works in a public safety position here in Santa Clara County. Jeff Ferris is an administrative-coordinator contractor for high-tech companies in the Silicon Valley. Dave Peyton is an engineer at Micrel, a valley semiconductor firm. Dave Bryant works as a typographer and layout artist for a biweekly nurses' news magazine. Last, but not least, regular columnist Fred Patten works for Streamline Pictures in southern California.

All this was brought to mind by a reader's response to a topic in a recent installment of "Flaming Hairballs". It seems he felt that our characterization of this fine publication as a fanzine was an injustice to *Yarf!* While it's true that we strive to bring our readers a high-quality product, we are not, cannot be, and indeed do not wish to be considered a professional magazine. We very much prefer to view *Yarf!* as a sort of training ground for up and coming artists and writers, and as a forum for those who wish to contribute for the sheer love of the genre.

Found in an art catalog by Ed Strickland of Austin, TX and presented without comment: LEONINE DEMON. Probably from Susa, in southeastern Iran, c. 3000 BC. No clue has been found regarding this creature's identity or meaning, but it is one of the most visually arresting sculptures to survive from this period of antiquity. The small yet commanding figure undoubtedly represents a superhuman being possessing female characteristics and ineffable power. The Museum's copy is cast marble. Ht., including polymer base, 4 3/4". (F1096K) \$45.00

Once more from Gerald Perkins of San Jose, California:

I seem to be writing you a lot. Well, *Yarf!* #33 deserves comment.

I got a real chuckle out of the exploding newts. These critters give a new meaning to "salamander". I suppose one of the ones semi-cooked on a stick could demonstrate Newton's Third Law.

For once I'd read the books before Fred reviewed them. I found his reviews, particularly of Swann's Moreau trilogy, quite insightful. But maybe that's because I agree with him.

Oh, good, more Chelisse. Michael Payne is developing a nice, consistent world here; one in which there is a good economic reason for morphs. Society is what has to deal with the results of the economy. I want to learn more about it. More and more I'm seeing the physical Chelisse through Phil Bolton's eyes.

Jim Groat sure has fun at the cons. Lucky fellow.

"Tenderloin" — hm, Roger Zelazny's "Dream Master" in a furry world? If you're going to learn, learn from a master. I found the ending a bit too ambiguous, but otherwise a good story. Nice use of multiple meanings for "tenderloin". Dean Johnson's "Boudoir" made a good facing page.

"The Price of Admission" — ooh, that lady packs a *wicked* left! (And a *b-a-a-d* right! Ahem.) That bathing stool looks like it might be practical. I wonder if anyone's built one.

Hey, *Nitrocoon's* starting to make sense. *Ralph* isn't. Do I care? No. Am I having fun? Yes.

I'd forgotten that Jeremy Kidd writes as well as draws. Obviously his protagonist in "An Error in Spelling" needed a spell checker. On the other paw, some debts are a pleasure to pay, if exhausting. But what did the demones do for Jarith?

I'm going to be very careful about swatting sleepy-eyed bugs in the future.

Did you know that not very long ago, the devilish little construction worker would have lit the fuse with a Lucifer?

I saved comment on "Happily, Ever After" to last for a reason. That is some of the most powerful writing I've seen in *Yarf!* The story reached in, grabbed my emotions, and pulled. I hope we see many more stories by Tim Susman.

From Eric Hinkle of Northampton, PA:

Yarf! Another great issue in number 32! And to quote specifics....

1) Loved the cover! Monika Livingstone never fails with her toop-notch furry art. Lisa Iennaco, Anthony Waters, and Dean Johnson's pieces were good too — let's see some more from these people!

2) "Allentown". Right on, Roz! She must have lived out here, to know what it's like for steelworkers and their families. I don't know if I can agree with her view of the unions, though — I heard stories of what it was like when they went into Bethlehem Steel. Before it was over, they called out the state militia. Sounded like a scene from *Ace of Spades*.

3) And talking about the *Ace of Spades*, looks like the end is near, eh? I like most everybody in the story, so of course they'll all die or be maimed or whatever. I'll miss them. *Yarf!* will just seem a little poorer without them. Ah well, life goes on.



(Continued on page 6)

Patten's Pontifications

by Fred Patten

'Morph fandom is doing just fine in its own little world. However, it often seems as though it is unknown and/or misunderstood by the broader society of "fandom in general", which has the notorious stereotype of us as a group of mental adolescents who slaver over funny-animal pornography.

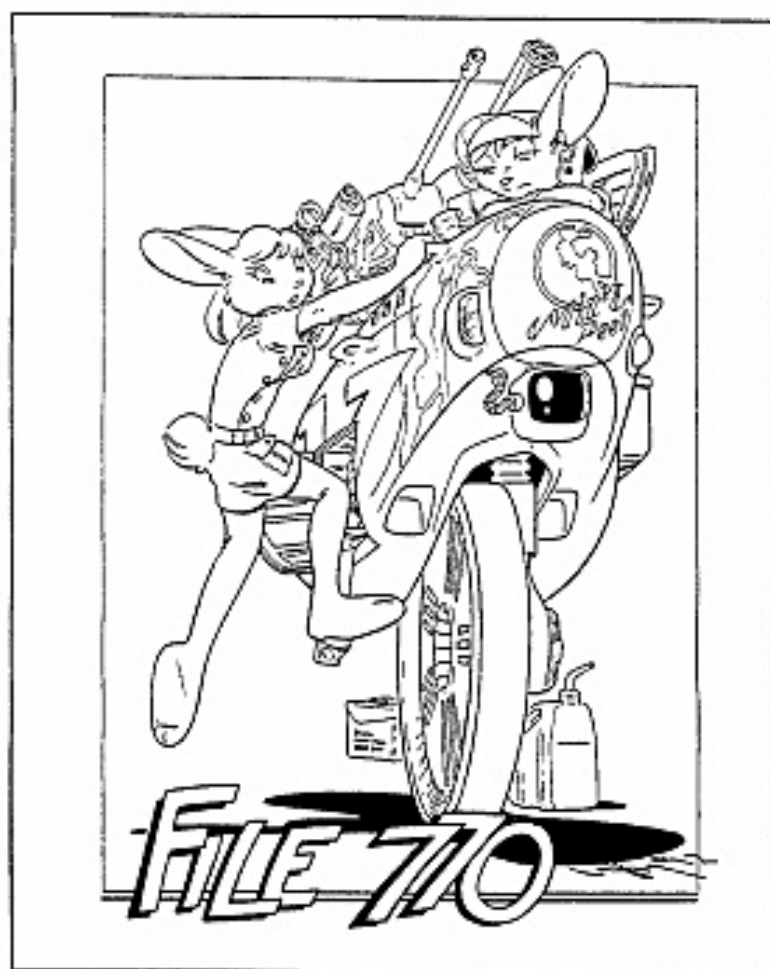
Two articles have just appeared that present a much more favorable and accurate description of us. Both are written by major practitioners in our field, and are probably as comprehensive as they can be without getting so detailed as to become boring to general readers.

File 770 #105, August 1994, published by Mike Glycer (5828 Woodman Avenue, apt. 2, Van Nuys, Calif. 91401; no individual price listed, \$8.00 for 5 issues) is a 22-page issue of Glycer's Hugo-winning fanzine of general commentary on SF fandom. This issue includes a three-page survey of furry fandom, "Essential Refurance", by Taral Wayne.

Taral mentions the creation of the "funny animal" APA *Vootie* by Reed Waller and Ken Fletcher in 1976, but he feels that furry fandom wasn't really established until 1984, when two things happened: first, *Vootie* died and was replaced by *Rowrbrazzle*, a more successful "fanzine club" for funny-animal artists to socialize in and nurture their common interest; and second, furry independent comics became a self-aware separate category, with Reed Waller and Kate Worley's *Omaha, the Cat Dancer*, Joshua Quagmire's *Cutey Bunny* (in his *Army Surplus Komikz*), and Jim Groat's *Equine the Uncivilized*.

Taral's brief survey covers the existence of furry fanzines such as *Yarf!* and *Bestiary*, the furry BBSs and Furry-MUCK, and the social gatherings at our own ConFurences and other conventions such as the San Diego Comic-Con, which have become unofficially established as places where furry fans should congregate. However, after noting the successful establishment of these, he adds, "The one area of the funny animal field that once led and perhaps lags now is the black and white comic." He then devotes a whole page — a third of the article, the largest single portion — to a history of the 'morph independent comics since 1984.

It seems strange that the bulk of this survey concentrates on what Taral feels may currently be its least successful aspect. The roll call of evanescent titles implies that furry fandom is always on the brink of expiring. But there is a point to this. Taral editorializes that, while we may not be growing, we are not losing ground. Cancelled titles are always replaced by an equal number of new ones. Furry fans are loyal to the genre, and deter-



mined not to let it die. But is this enough? "Can [furry fandom] grow far without more development of its public face, the comic book? Or is a professional side in fact irrelevant?" How do we feel about this? Do we want furry fandom to expand, or to remain *cosa nostra*, our own small, private thing?

(There are a couple of minor errors. *Equine the Uncivilized* ought to be credited to Richard Konkle as well as to Jim Groat. Taral says that the final appearance of *Vootie* was in 1984, and that, "At almost the moment *Vootie* passed away, Marc Schirmeister brought into being a new APA, called *Rowrbrazzle*." *Vootie* #37 was published in February 1983 and *Rowrbrazzle* #1 was published in February 1984, so they were actually a year apart, although Taral is correct in that Schirmeister, a *Vootie* member, tried for several months to keep *Vootie* going before giving up and creating *Rowrbrazzle* as a replacement for it. So there was a direct continuity between the two.)

This favorable survey would be noteworthy if it were not overshadowed by the almost simultaneous publication of a twelve-and-a-half-page analysis in a "Special Furry Fandom Issue" of *Phlogiston* (#40, the 42-page fourth 1994 issue; published by Alex Heatley, P. O. Box 11-708, Man-



ners Street, Wellington, New Zealand; NZ\$3.00 or US\$6.00). The *File 770* survey is for those who want only a brief description of furry fandom. The *Phlogiston* in-depth article is for those who want to know what furry fandom is *really* about. (And *Phlogiston* #41 includes additional discussions of furry fandom in its letters column.)

This is actually two articles, one by Jefferson Swycaffer and one by Craig Hilton. Swycaffer's article is itself in two parts. He first defines "Furry Fandom" as "the organized appreciation and dissemination of art and prose regarding 'Furries,' or fictional mammalian anthropomorphic characters." After briefly tracing its fascination back to prehistoric tribal shamanism and the mythology of Egypt and Greece, Swycaffer analyses its attraction in three psychological and behavioristic motifs: *the desire for communication with animals, the release of the instinct for sexual attraction, and the release for a kind of parenting instinct, with the latter two effects being triggered by visual cues.* The second part is a survey, which is almost as long as Taral's entire piece in *File 770*, of the more notable characters and titles in anthropomorphic comics of the past fifteen years.

Craig Hilton's even longer "Insider's View from the Outside" is a masterful description and history of furry fan-

dom, especially since Hilton keeps apologizing for his lack of knowledge due to his isolation in Western Australia. The only gap that I see is in his admitted ignorance as to exactly when and how the tradition of furry room parties with those notorious black sketchbooks got started at fan conventions, and that is covered in the discussions in *Phlogiston* #41. Hilton has facts here that I didn't know, such as that the specific term "Furry Fandom" was being used in fanzines as early as 1983. As good as Taral's and Swycaffer's articles are, they are almost superfluous next to this seven-page history, which generally gives the same information in greater and more succinct detail. In general, this could appear in the *Encyclopedia Britannica* as a definitive summary of the entire scope of Furry Fandom.

It's nice to know that there is a favorable review of 'morph fandom in *File 770* #105, but unless you're collecting every publication with even a slight reference to our genre in it, you don't need this. *Phlogiston* #40, on the other hand, should be read by everyone who is seriously interested in a comprehensive and intelligent depiction of furry fandom — or who wants one on hand to show to acquaintances who ask, "What do you see in that Furry sex stuff?" In addition to the writing, *Phlogiston* is well-illustrated with a dozen examples of the art of such leading 'morph cartoonists as Hilton himself, Taral Wayne, Ken Fletcher, Chris Grant, Steve Gallacci, Tommy Yune, and others.

Incidentally, the use of the term "Furry Fandom" by both *File 770* and *Phlogiston* is a strong argument that this has become the standard name for our genre, whether we like it or not — although there is not yet any standardization as to whether the words should be capitalized.

Chorus Skating, by Alan Dean Foster. New York, Warner Books/Aspect, October 1994, 344 pages, \$5.99; ISBN 0-446-36237-9.

Authors — and reviewers — of long-running series have the problem that, when new titles are too similar to previous volumes, the reaction tends to be, "Ho, hum, the same old stuff." But when they are too different, there are complaints that, "This isn't the series that everybody knows and loves!", rather than congratulations for originality.

Chorus Skating is the eighth* of Foster's *Spellsinger* novels. The first six, published between 1983 and 1986, related the adventures of Jon-Tom Meriweather, a human wanna-be rock guitarist, in a funny-animal universe where music has magical powers. Each novel featured Jon-Tom and his lovably grumpy sidekick, Mudge the otter, on a quest to save the world from some dire menace. There were plenty of colorful supporting characters, such as a rabbit riverboat gambler and a parrot pirate. The series was a skillful blend of humor, light ad-

*More specifically, it is the eighth paperback volume. The first two books are actually a single novel in two parts, and they were originally published as one title, *Spellsinger at the Gate*. So it is debatable as to whether *Chorus Skating* is the seventh or the eighth novel.

venture, and a threat of serious danger. Foster apparently decided that he was finished with the series with the sixth volume, because he very pointedly wrapped up all the loose ends and gave it a happily-ever-after conclusion.

When Foster revived the series in 1993, he got around that conclusion by setting *Son of Spellsinger* eighteen years later, and starring the teen-age children of Jon-Tom and of Mudge. (Reviewed in *Yarf!* #26.) It was nice to see the series back, but the teens just didn't have the charisma of their parents.

Now Foster has returned to his formula, with all of the plusses and minuses that this means. He has found an amusing and plausible excuse to bring Jon-Tom and Mudge back: they are having a mid-life crisis, and want to prove to themselves that they are not too old to go adventuring any more. Their goal is to have just a little adventure, not much more than a camping trip. But before they realize it, they are joining in the rescue of a beautiful princess — make that a whole bevy of beautiful, headstrong 'morph princesses — from a brigand lord. Events escalate from there until, once again, they must save the whole world from an ominous disaster.

The parts of *Chorus Skating* are greater than the whole. Jon-Tom and Mudge are their old selves, and *Spellsinger* fans will delight to have them back. There are colorful new characters, such as the half-dozen richly-dressed princesses (mongoose, lynx, gorilla, etc.) who are not used to roughing it during their rescue; Lieutenant Naike, the harried commander of the mongoose royal guards who finds himself expected to return each of the princesses to her own kingdom; Silimbar, the tamarin traveling merchant; and many more. There are exotic new locales, like the delta city of Mashupro, consisting of self-aware houses on stilts that can walk about at their dwellers' commands. And the individual adventures that Jon-Tom, Mudge, and their companions encounter are reasonable and well-handled.

However, the overall tone of *Chorus Skating* makes it a comparatively weak novel. The basic premise, of two middle-aged heroes coming out of retirement to convince themselves that they still have what it takes, may be heart-warming, but it lacks the drama of the earlier adventures. The world-threatening — nay, *universe-threatening* — disaster that eventually materializes is the most implausible in the whole series. As a serious menace, it ranks with Dr. Soran in *Star Trek: Generations*. It also feels like it was tacked on just because *Chorus Skating* wouldn't be true to the *Spellsinger* formula if it didn't end with a threat to the whole world. As a result, *Chorus Skating* doesn't build to a climax as much as it fizzles out.

It's been nice to be with Jon-Tom and Mudge once again, but maybe it would be best to leave them in happy retirement now. ☹

FLAMING HAIRBALLS

(Continued from page 3)

4) "Owner". The ugly side of the Double Helix world. Still a well-told story. The most disheartening part was Walter's becoming as bad as the people he hated. I don't know why I expected more nobility than that, saving that furrydom essentially is about "hero stories". From *Albedo* on down, 99% of all "furry" stories are primarily about heroic individuals — people who defeat their enemies not by power but simply by Doing the Right Thing.

Which is the main improvement over most current comics, I think.

Well, I want to wrap this up, so I'll hurry. Jim Groat and *Robert and Katrina* were funny as always.

Where're Jack Lynch and Susan? Or for that matter, everybody's favorite "space furrries", the Thalendri? I miss Marta and the Haiuts.

Lastly, if you want some more amateur stories at *Yarf!*, why not try putting the occasional picture in and challenging the readers to come up with a story that best goes with it? You could give the winner a free issue of *Yarf!* as a reward. That should raise some interest!

So long and good luck.

And last but not least from one of our regular contributors, Roy D. Pounds II:

Hidey!

What's this? Deadly, explosive bugs, volatile newts and sinister, insidious plots between characters to do each other in? (Why wasn't I invited?)

I hadn't had as much fun with an issue of *Yarf!*, since that first one aeons ago. It kinda reminded me of that coyote-road runner cartoon in which ol' Wile E. let loose all those delta-winged sticks of dynamite. (Funny how with a lit fuse, they only exploded on contact.)

Toss another newt on the fire for me. ☹

Deadlines (We really mean it this time...!)

Remember, the deadlines listed are *not* written in stone, and are subject to change without notice — bearing that in mind, though, we would like to point out that we are going to be more rigorous about them in the future. (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....

#36: 30 April 1995

#39: 31 October 1995

#37: 30 June 1995

#40: 31 December 1995

#38: 31 August 1995

#41: 29 February 1996

WORLD CON 52

PICKING UP PETER STOLLAR AT MADISON AIRPORT

WINNIPEG

ON THE WAY UP I DIVERT 5 MILES TO ANANDALE MINNESOTA TO THE ODDEST HOUSE IN MINNESOTA. A HOUSE I HAD LIVED IN. THE NEW OWNERS KEPT THE PLACE NICE.



JUST OUTSIDE ST. CLOUD MINNESOTA, A RED VAN FROM MONTANA BLOWS OUR TIRES OFF. TAKING ADVANTAGE OF A HIGH SPEED RADAR RUNNER, WE AVERAGE 95 MPH ALL THE WAY TO FARGO N.D.



CROSSING THE CANADIAN BORDER, PETER PULLS AN ASSHOLE STUNT. WE'RE DETAINED 3 1/2 HOURS.



GETTING RIPPED OFF ON A USED TIRE. I HAD NO CHOICE IN THE MATTER.



HAVING AN EXCELLENT MEAL AT ICHIBAN STEAK HOUSE.



PETER AND I CONTINUE OVER THE EXPERIMENTS OF CHICAGO AND SAN FRANCISCO WORLDCONS BY DROPPING GRAPES AND CHERRY TOMATOS FROM THE 18TH FLOOR OF THE SHERATON HOTEL ON PARKED CARS



WASPS WASPS EVERYWHERE.



FINALLY HAVING A REAL CUBAN CIGAR, A SMOOTH PLEASANT SMOKE

BEFORE I LEFT WINNIPEG I WENT BACK FOR MORE.



SITTING AT THE CONFERENCE TABLE, DEAD DEAD DEAD



WATCHING SOVIET SPACE DISASTERS, HUGH GREGORY HOSTED

HERE YOU SEE THE L-5 ROCKET HAVING DIFFICULTIES THE EXPLOSION FROM THIS ROCKET WAS 10 TIMES THAT OF THE CHALLENGER. A BIG MESS THERE



HITTING THE VARIOUS USED BOOK STORES IN WINNIPEG.



PETER AND I GET SHANGHAIED INTO DRAWING AT THE FURRY PARTY.



PETE AND I GET CAUGHT IN A HEAVY DOWNPOUR GOING TO THE PARTIES AFTER THE FURRY PARTY



THE MASQUERADE WAS AMONG THE BEST EVER DONE. THE COSTUMERS DANCED DURING THE JUDGING.



LAST MINUTE ATTEMPT OF SELLING STUFF ON MONDAY



BREEZING THROUGH U.S. CUSTOMS ON THE WAY HOME.





LYNX

©1994

I paused outside the store's window front and picked nervously at a plastic fern. Someone was going to laugh, I was sure. I could already feel the back of my neck fur growing warm.

I looked around to find a security guard glaring at me from the other side of the walkway. Puzzled, I glanced down to find that my claws had nearly shredded the *faux* plant to death; my face grew warm as my hand shot away from the greenery and disappeared behind my back. He gave me one last frown and sauntered farther along the upper deck of the mall.

Before I could so much as glance back at the store, however, a passing panther purred loudly at me, a brash teen in a black leather jacket and black jeans — if his slightly dappled fur and his clothes had not been of different shades of black, I might have taken him for a shadow. "Busy Saturday night?" he asked pleasantly, his ears perked. Eyes of amber roamed over my body and stopped at places I'd rather that they hadn't.

"I... um, yeah, I am, sorry." I felt a little guilty seeing his ears droop — but not much. It would have been far too awkward to try to explain my circumstances. Besides, I did have plans for Saturday, though not of my own devising.

I sighed quietly, relieved, when he continued down the mall. My T-shirt rustled uncomfortably against my chest as I did so, a little tight. Reminded of my business, I shifted my shirt a bit, then stepped quickly toward the store before I found another reason to delay.

Despite my anxiety, the store did its best to be warm and inviting. Soft music wafted from inside, a tune that I did not recognize directly but that played games of tag with snatches of half-remembered melodies. Within and in front of the glass window front, I saw not the expected mannequins but small oaken tables set with chessboard tiles and a few mugs of coffee that smelled sweet and rich.

I took a hesitant step toward the store, then another. Finally, I summoned my courage and walked inside, trying to look as casual as I could about it, despite the fact that my legs all quivered.

A tortoise-shell cat was at my side almost immediately. She looked me over, her orange eyes intent, and then she broke into a warm smile. "Hello," she said, almost purring. "My name is Isolde. Welcome to TKI&I! What may I do for you today?"

"I... umm, just looking," I stammered.

"All right!" she said cheerfully. "If you see anything you like, let me know and I'll help you with it!" With that, she glided behind a table, picked up a clipboard, and started making marks on the top sheet, apparently taking inventory.

I slowly padded around the racks of clothing, being care-

TKI&I

By David Green

Illustrated by Conrad Wong

Isolde created by Maggie de Alarcon;
Isolde and TKI&I used with permission

ful lest my hindbody knock one over. I lifted a few sleeves, looked at them against my clouded-leopard-spotted fur, stroked my fingertips over the soft fabric. Everything looked nice... but I couldn't envision any of it on myself. Admitting defeat, I called Isolde back over.

She joined me with a cheerful expression. "Yes, ma'am?"

"I'm looking for something formal — something appropriate to wear to a ball," I confessed. "But I'm not sure exactly what... I've never done this before."

Isolde nodded, and looked thoughtful for a moment. "You don't need anything for... down there, do you?" She indicated my hindbody.

I shook my head. "I don't think so. Unless you have something formal that fits a 'taur down there?'"

"Well, nothing that's intended to," she said. "Though if you wanted something, I suppose I could find —"

"That's all right," I interrupted, half-forcing a smile. "I'll just see what you have; I'm sure it will be fine."

She nodded, and pointed across the store. "I think I have something that would look just perfect on you over there," she said. "Follow me."

Carefully, I padded after her, glancing about at the different clothes. I felt horribly unsure of myself — mostly because I hadn't been female long, and had no concept of how to shop for clothes for a female. It was amusing in a way. Magic ran rampant through this place. It was only natural that I should eventually be caught, even if it was just a tease from a friend.

Gender-swapping was, however, an interesting way of showing friendly affection, I mused with a bit of a chuckle. At least he'd offered to swap me back if I showed up to a formal ball like this — hence my need for a new outfit. Besides, shifted like this, I found my clothes chafing in strange places.

Meanwhile, Isolde riffled through a rack of vests swiftly. She pulled one part way out, considered it, looked back at me, and put it back, shaking her head. Her fingers danced a few outfits down and stopped at a black one with gold trim. Pulling it partway out, she eyed me, then the vest again. "Here, hold this," she said, handing it and a belt she snared from a rack to me. Tentatively, I took them. Tassels dangled from the belt into the fur on my arm, tickling slightly.

I looked the vest over and tried vainly to imagine it on me while Isolde rushed over to a rack of blouses and glanced rapidly between them and me, pulling them out seemingly at random, and rejecting them for no stronger purpose. Just when I finally gave up on creating a mental image of the vest on me, Isolde triumphantly took a blouse fully from the rack and paraded over with it. "Take this," she said. "Dressing rooms are over there. I want you to try these on, while I get some accessories ready for you."

Slightly bemused at the whole process, I retired to the dressing room she indicated, which was, fortunately, spacious enough even for a 'taur. It ought to be simple enough, I told myself as I stripped off my shirt. The blouse goes on first. Then the belt. Then the vest.

When I tried to button the blouse, I found that the buttons were put on the wrong way. I almost said something, but I recalled from somewhere that ladies' blouses did have buttons on the "wrong" side. I muttered something about stupid customs, and laboriously fastened the garment. I wrapped the cord belt about it, trying to fasten the buckle and manage the tassels which insisted on going every which way. The vest was far more cooperative.

Finally dressed again, I timidly ventured out of the room. "How bad is it?" I asked Isolde when I caught sight of her.

"Bad?" She grinned. "You look absolutely gorgeous! Here; put these on, too." The shopkeeper presented me with a hodgepodge of bead and pearl bracelets. More recalcitrant tassels dangled from them, and promptly tangled when the bracelets transferred to my hand. "Goon," she said, seeing me hesitate. "It won't hurt."

Slowly, I unknotted the bracelets and slipped them one at a time onto my left wrist. Meanwhile, I felt Isolde busily doing something or other to my tail. "Almost finished," she said, walking up alongside me again. Her hands slid something around my neck, fastening it in back.

"Let's have a look at it," she said, leading me over to an ornate mirror. Timidly, I peered into it — and was surprised at what I saw. The blouse was a more lacy affair than I'd thought, the half-length sleeves nigh-transparent. The vest contrasted nicely with it, and the gold trim sparkled. A phoenix pendant adorned a choker at my neck, while a ribbon wrapped about my tail. Isolde fussed with my hair a bit, drawing it over my shoulder.

"What do you think?" she asked.

A hint of a purr escaped my throat. "It's very nice," I said softly. Then with a smile, I added, "I think even my friend will be impressed...."

Isolde looked pleased. "Really," she said in a tone that wasn't quite a question. "I'm glad you like it." She adjusted the sleeve a little, and I "helped" her by primping a bit, gazing into the mirror. Satisfied with her arrangement of the blouse, she stepped back a little. "Is there anything more I can get you?"

"No," I said. "This is lovely. Thank you."

"It was my pleasure," she replied. "Will I be seeing you here again?"

"Oh, aye," I said, looking at her in the mirror. "How could I not?"

Next time, though, I thought, I'd rather do it male. I glanced at my reflection. Or perhaps not....





BULLSEYE.

Neverlast

CANADIAN
WORDS
TOUR
'91



© *W* *W* *W* '93

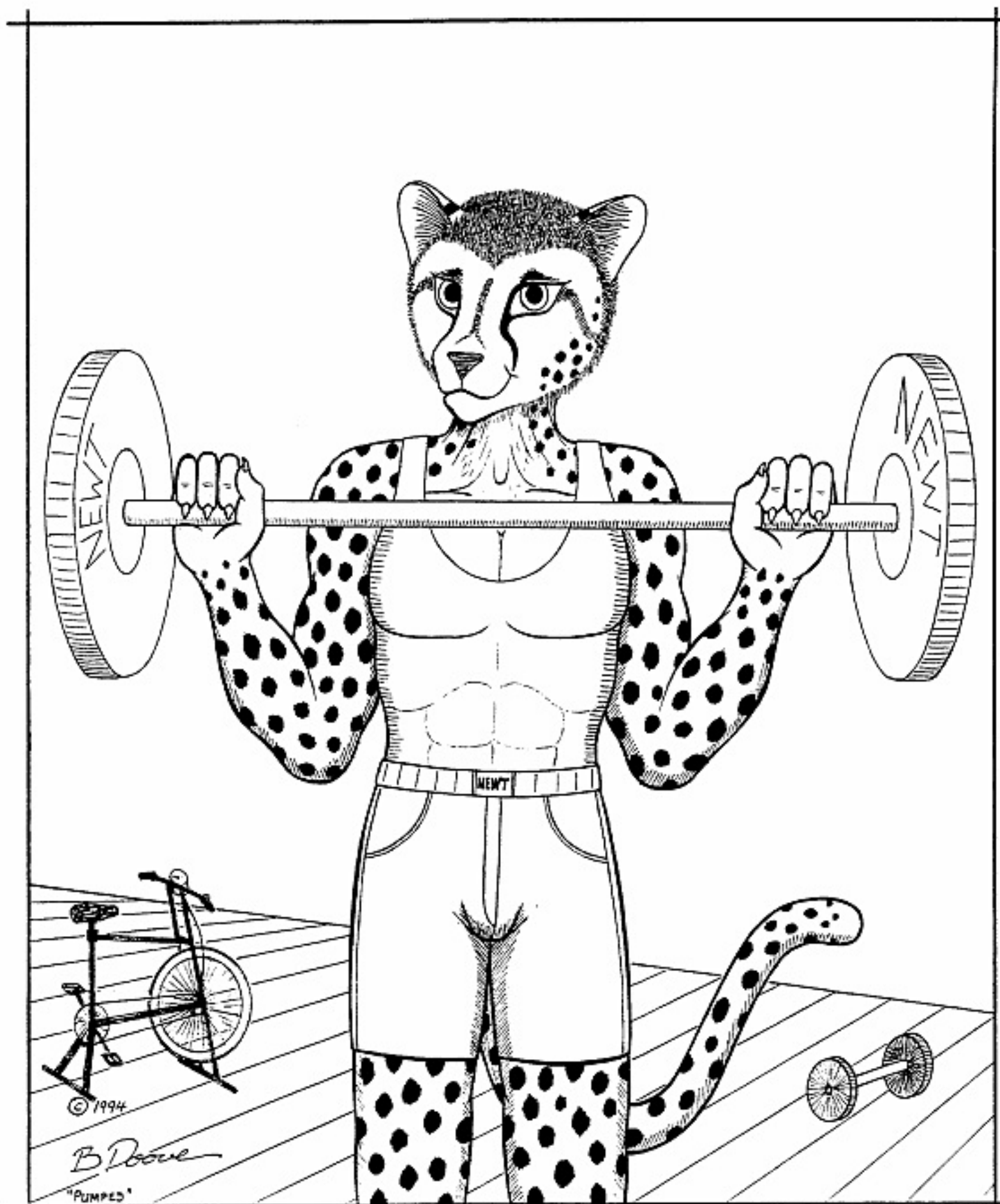


FOXY © '93.



RAM-BO : "Don't call me Beaugard"

© '94 B Doove





TWO YEARS WE WORKED FOR THIS, AND THE FIRST DAY...



THE D.J. POSITION! I'VE ONLY BEEN TALKING ABOUT IT FOR A MONTH!

OH... YEAH

WELL, I WAS PLANNING ON SENDING YOU OUT TO THE FAIR THIS EVENING. VIXEN AND THE NACHTSKINDER ARE PLAYING THE CONCERT TONIGHT!

AT
7-24-93

I KNOW! THEY'RE DOING ONE AT NOON, TOO, AND THE STATION WANTS ME OUT THERE TO COVER IT!

WHAT! RUBY, I HAVE TO GET A STORY! IS THERE ANY...

LOOK, I GOTTA BEAT TRACKS! TALK TO YA LATER, 'KAY?

NO, WAIT!

CLICK

RUBY!!

SHIT! NOW WHAT AM I SUPPOSED TO...

URR... EXCUSE ME...?

YES? MAY I HELP YOU?

YEAH, I HAD AN INTERVIEW...

PERFECT! GOT ANY TRANSPORTATION?

UHH... FEET?

2

RE CAN TAKE YOU OUT. HERE,
THIS'LL COVER THE BUS BACK
AND BUY YOU SOME LUNCH...



VIXEN AND THE NACHTSKINDER ARE PLAYING
A NOON CONCERT AT THE FAIR. THEY ARE BIG
IN EUROPE, AND HALF THE AMERICAN CAMPUSES
HAVE BEEN TRYING TO LAND AN ENGAGEMENT



GETTING 'EM FOR HOMECOMING WAS LIKE
SOME MAJOR COUP...
AND JUST MY LUCK
WE'RE SHORT ON
REPORTERS!



OKAY! PEN, PENCILS, NOTEPAD... HERE'S
A DICTASCRIBE IF YOU NEED IT...



AND AN EXTRA
BATTERY PACK,
JUST IN CASE!

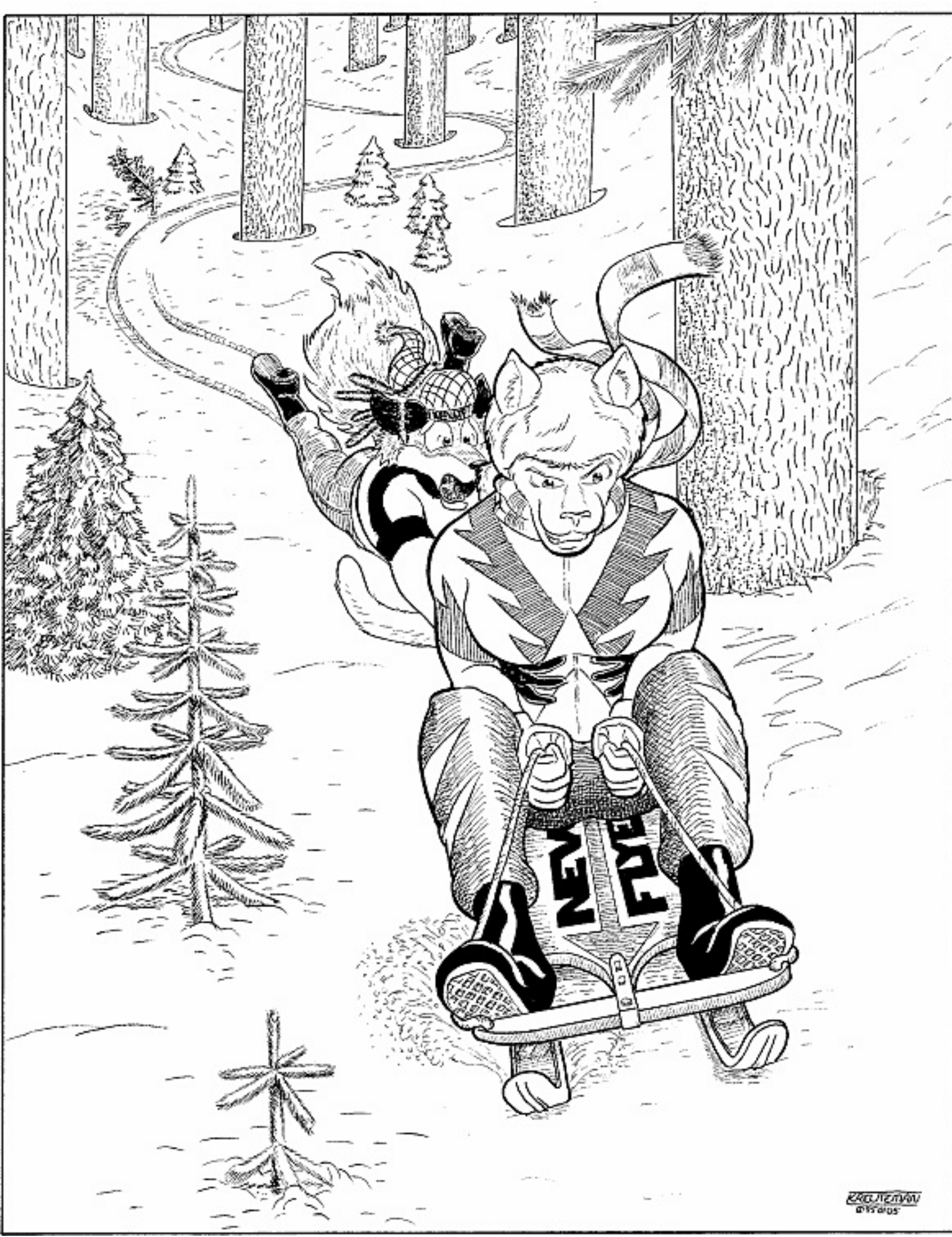
THERE! **NOW** YOU'RE SET
FOR AN INTERVIEW!
ANY QUESTIONS?



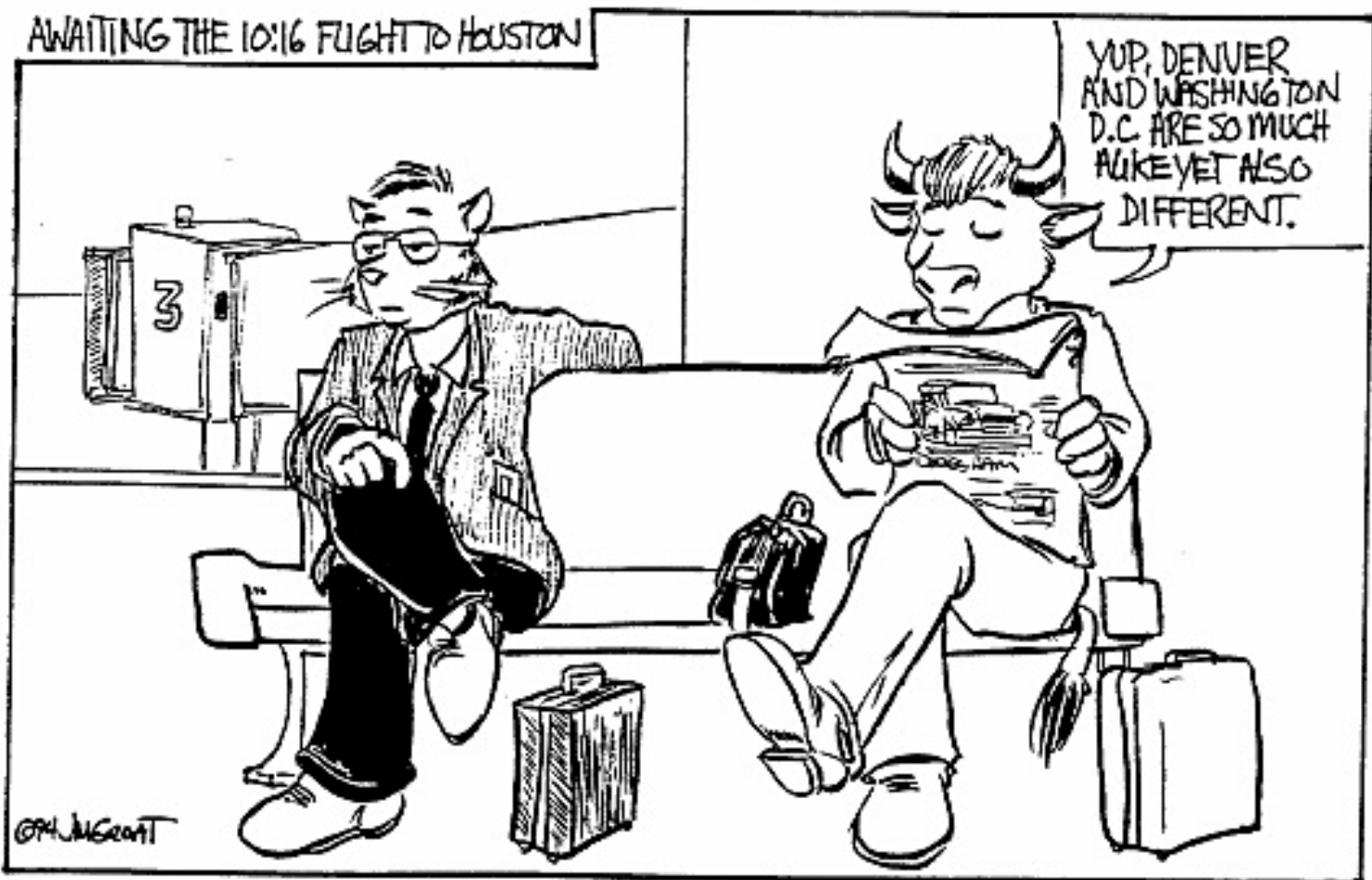
UH, YEAH...



DID I JUST
GET A JOB??



AWAITING THE 10:16 FLIGHT TO HOUSTON



OH? HOWS THAT?

WELL, YOU CAN'T LAND A PLANE AT THE NEW AIRPORT YET...



BUT YOU CAN AT THE WHITE HOUSE



ONCE AGAIN THE CONTINUING
STORY OF:

Ralph the
Infounder Hamster

IN:

VARIED DEGREES
OF DARKNESS

Roy D. POUNDS II

FLOATING DEBRIS

PART 4

SHELLA DA
MANAFFECT © SCOTT
THOMAS

STRANGE
BITS OF
LIGHTNESS:

JAMES W.
ALVES
© 1994

GOTTA GET
LOOSE NOISE
SORTA LIKE
LOW PRICE

CHATTER
AND IT'S ON 3
ONLY 20100
ERAL NEW IT
LEAST A NE
ME WHEN

HOPE YOU
LIKE IT
ROUND

HAMMA
HAMMA

YOU EEDIOT!
WHAT DEED YOU DOO??



I dunno know! OUCH
I dunno know! OW!

SKEECH
SKEECH!

ZAP!

WHETHER I LIKED IT OR NOT
I WAS SUDDENLY SURROUNDED
BY AN INTENSELY VERBAL-UM-
SALESPERSON NAMED SHEILA...

AND WAS A "HAMSTER ON THE SPOT!"

It's wonder how he found ush?

A-NUH-NUH - HIS TRACKING ABILITY
IS ASTOUNDING! QUICK! MOVE!



11 STAIRS
10TH FLOOR
SECTOR G, H
GRAVITY

A-NUH - WE CAN'T HAVE
A CREATURE LIKE THAT
FOLLOWING US! NEW-
WE MUST DESTROY IT!

FOR YOUR
SAFETY
PLEASE USE
HAND
RAIL





AND OF COURSE YOU'RE GOING TO NEED CALIBRATORS AN' HYDROSPROCKET ADJUSTERS AND THESE WILL INCREASE YOUR PERSONAL SEX APPEAL IMMENSELY...

LEFT ONE OF THESE LAST WEEK... SORTA MADE A B... SS RIGHT HER... A REAL...

OH! HERE'S AN ITEM N... T"SPACER CAN BE WITH... ONE OF THESE...

COPS! WRONG COLOR! SORRY!

SAY WHAT?!

MAKES YOU UNDER IF ITS S... IT YA JUST GO... RTA LIKE...

BOOH! I LOVE THESE BETTER THAN CHOCOLAT...

WISH I COULD ORDER SOME MORE SO...

FIND OF COURSE NO TRIP TO SPACER EMPORIUM® WOULD BE COMPLETE WITH A VISIT TO: BOO...

COM-A-RAMA
SPACE SURPLUS
SMALLPRINTERS WILL BE NEERFULLY REFORATED!

PLEASE CHECK WEAPONS WITH CLERK

LEVELE-ET
OF EQUL UP

NA BATA WA TANE
COM SUBATA HE'

BOO-BOO BUFO
>ROCK AOOOBS!

ASK US ABOUT OUR LOW RATES

WHERE YA TAKIN' ME? CAN'T SEE DIDDY...

BOOH! THEY CHANGED THE DISPLAYS! YOU GOTTA TRY TH...

WE HAD MORE FUN HERE THAN ANY OTHER LE...

HUH? WHAT?

-A-HEE-HE - CHUCKLE-HE
NEW TOYS! NEW TOYS!

BUM!
POTRAZEES
I LIVE
AXOLOTL

Yeath! I'dth sthure luvth to meet hup with thap hampthur rightn now!

HEY! WHATCHIT!



PLUNK!
PLUNK!

ELEVENTEEN AND
TWENTY-LESSEE
NOW- TWELVETY
NINE TCEN-UM.

YWRASH!

WOT
DUH?

CRUNCH!

CRUMBLE
CRUMBLE
CRUMBLE

HA-HEE-HEE-AH HAH!
JUST TRY TO RUN NOW!
A-HEH-HEH-HEE-HA

OH WOW! THE
MAINTENANCE GUYS ARE
GONNA BE STEAMED!
UM- I GOTTA FIND THE UTILE
GIRL'S ROOM- NOW!

OH SH-

HELP!

TINKLE



I was sold during the fifth anniversary of Gene-corps' business of custom-making "critters" for the affluent. This, they told me, made me special. Although the modified animals Gene-corps made had no rights in any direction at all, I was allowed to be self-educated, just as long as I didn't complain when I had to bend over and take the pain.

I suppose I sound a bit embittered about those who care for and feed me, but I'm not just a pet, even if I am what they call a "morphed" female skunk. They redid my breasts so that only two remained and these were put on my chest. They were puffed up with plasma implants to the point that I have occasional back-aches. They told me that my name was to be Olivia. I don't know why, but being given a name instead of choosing one for myself somehow robs some of my individuality. That's what it's like to be a slave, I guess. My grinding bitterness towards the humans was well hidden, so that not even Gene-corps shrinks could detect it. As far as anyone was concerned, I was happy to be here, no worries, no problem, how can I serve you, master.

I was delivered in a white van to my owner, told that I was lucky to not be delivered in a cryo-tank like earlier models. Another reminder of how lucky I was to be alive. The guy who came down from the posh residence looked like a sad-eyed pudgy farmer with a face that was beginning to sag and wrinkle. I figured he was forty-five or so. His name was Joshua Keller, and he kept staring at me the whole time the delivery man was going over the details of my dietary needs. He wasn't looking at me the way a thousand other male humans did, with boiling lust, but as if I were an golden art object dredged up from a tomb. Maybe this guy wouldn't be so bad, I thought.

After the release papers were signed, the delivery man drove off, leaving me with the human who would rule my life. He seemed kind enough as he introduced himself. He kept looking at my face instead of my tits, which helped me hope for a truly civil master. His house was huge! Two stories high, with at least twenty-five rooms. Why would one human want so much space for himself?

It was during our half-hour tour of his place that I felt the warning bells go off in my head. The feeling of danger didn't come from him, but from a room, the one room he didn't show me. I almost asked him what was wrong with that particular room, but I checked myself. I almost made a big mistake, asking him something like that. Humans, at least the ones that I know, don't realize that animals, "modified" or otherwise, can sense things that humans don't seem to detect.

I read in a book about unusual phenomena — that farm animals, for instance, would get really jittery and nervous hours or days before an earthquake hit the area. That same book told about dogs that barked at walls and empty hallways and cats that fled from seemingly

Animus

By Nat Brogden

empty rooms. Was it possible, I realized with a chill, that my animal qualities helped me feel the threat behind the closed door? Could I tell Joshua that? He apparently didn't notice my worried expression. He kept on walking and talking, getting further away from the ignored room, so I trotted over to his side, thankful for the growing sense of safeness. I'd have to give that place a closer look, I promised myself. If I was to live here for the rest of my life, I wanted to know every inch of this house.

Joshua was astonished at my ability to spot two conflicting kinds of decor in the house, one kind dealing with art deco pieces, the other with glorious, detailed paintings of flowers. I also smelled slight hints of perfume here and there. When I asked him if there was someone else living with him, he shook his head, saying nothing while looking away from me.

I spotted a gold-framed photograph on the fireplace mantle. I was just tall enough to take it down for a better look. She was a pretty, sweet-faced blonde. Judging by the quality of the picture, I guessed it was at least a few years old. Under the picture was an oval emblem with the words "Best Beloved".

"Joshua?" I said. "Who is this?"

"It's no one you know. Put that back." The scolding tone of his voice jolted me, but I didn't show it.

When I put the picture back where I found it, Joshua was standing too close behind me for comfort while staring at me. When I looked at his face, I saw eyes as cold as a toad's. After we cleaned and put away the dishes, Joshua said it was time to go to bed. I had been waiting for that

and at least tried to keep a straight face as he led me to his bedroom. It turned out to be next to the mysterious room. Great. As he undressed I realized that I didn't have any clothes except what I was wearing. When I pointed this out, he said to use one of his bathrobes. I went to the dresser he pointed to. When I pulled out a decidedly feminine nightgown and looked at him with one raised brow, his face went cold again. I felt it was best not to put on that article, so I slipped into a black kimono dragon robe instead. We both climbed into bed but nothing happened when the lights went out except for his arm curling around me in a cuddle-hold, the way a little kid holds a teddy bear.

Many humans don't realize this, but human horniness has a kind of musky smell to it. I smelled only a little of that from him. Odd how he didn't make any moves on me. My critter-model, with all my intelligence implants and breast modifications, had to run about thirty thousand dollars. That's a lot of cash to spend on just a cuddly pet. Maybe there was more to him than I had cynically presumed. There almost always was with humans.

After a half-hour of waiting, I heard a rattling, intermittent snore. Good. I didn't want him hearing me bumping around in the next room. The plush carpeting in the hall and my bare feet kept my sneaking quiet. I could only hear my own breathing, could only feel the fear a farmer feels as he sees a tornado snaking towards him. When that door opens, I thought as I stood in front of the room, will giant clawed boogeyman hands yank me inside? Will the floor be gone, a spiked pit the only thing to see before I fall in? These were only rambling, childish thoughts, but fear of the dark makes children of us all, I guess. I touched the doorknob with my fingertips, then slid my hand around the knob. Clenching my teeth, I opened the door and faced the darkness.

I then felt like a farmer who's standing right next to a landscape-filling tornado. My ears swiveled around but I couldn't hear a bump in the dark. I pawed the wall for a light-switch and, having found it, readied myself for the blood-stained room.

Light.

Nothing. Just a den-like room. I would have felt disappointed if I hadn't been still scared. The dread, the knowledge that something was amiss grew until it almost felt like mist on my fur. That's when I saw the woman suddenly appear. A translucent blonde jumping back towards me as if she had been startled. I yipped in surprise. Holding my hand over my mouth, I jumped back into the hallway.

She was gone. Then she jumped backwards again. And again. And again. It dawned on me by degrees that I was looking at four seconds of one occurrence, like a film that's played over and over again. There was action, but no sound. It took five replays for me to muster the courage to examine her. As I crept into the room, Joshua's snoring

being an assurance that I wouldn't be caught, I discovered that this four-second show was three-dimensional. As I walked around her, I got to see who she was and what it was that made her fall backwards.

It was the woman in the gold-framed photo. I couldn't see anything but her, but it looked like someone had fired a gun at her face. With a bright, silent gunshot flash in her face, a powderburned hole plugged into her forehead, the back of her head opening up. Fortunately nothing more could be seen in that minute death-scene. This apparition must have been what humans call a "ghost" or "animus". I found myself talking to her out loud.

"Who did this to you?" I didn't expect an answer. Hell, I still wasn't completely sure what I was looking at.

It was on the fifteenth repeat that I noticed a slight change in the transparent woman; the eyes, once looking at her attacker, were now fixed on me.

"Oh, shit," I whispered. *This is not real*, I told myself. I never would have guessed that something so seemingly harmless could be so frightening.

But all she did was give me the look of someone in unbearable pain, as if she were begging me to save her. Someone killed me, the looped vision seemed to say, and you must help me.

Who could have killed her? Joshua had denied her very existence and therefore denied her death. That one fact made me come to a conclusion that I didn't want to even think about. This ghost still haunted the house of her killer. Small wonder he skipped over this room during the house-tour. This would explain why he purchased me; "morphs", as they like to call my kind, don't have any rights. He could kill me and, if I understand the laws concerning Gene-corps "products", get away with just a slap on the wrist.

She was still staring at me when I came to another conclusion; if all this is so, then what will happen to me? I can't tell anyone what I saw, especially not Joshua. Would I end up like her, endlessly dying, forever suffering? Hate and fear of my owner swirled around inside me. Running away was no option. They would either destroy me on the grounds of "irreparably faulty thinking", or send me back to Joshua, who would do me in for sure.

There had to be a way out of this, I pondered as I left the lady alone to die again in the dark. I slept little with dread about my future almost making me cry.

In the morning, at the kitchen table, I could only pick at the special nutrient cereal that Gene-corps provided for critter buyers. I found it difficult even to look at Joshua.

"You're not hungry?" he asked. He looked at me quizzically. "You're not sick, are you?"

"Uh... no. I just had... scary dreams last night."

Joshua scooted his chair towards me at the kitchen table and said "What were those dreams about?"

I wanted to yell at him, exclaim that I knew all about his dirty little secret, but I had to keep quiet. My self-imposed silence to cover my ass had started to chew on my nerves. I had to answer him, though. What could I say that wouldn't sound like a lie?

"Olivia?"

Oh, damn it all, I thought. "I dreamt about ghosts."

Raising an eyebrow, he made a noncommittal "Hmm" and scooted his chair back to his breakfast. We didn't say anything else to each other for hours.

Joshua went out for the mail, giving me the opportunity to study the mystery lady's death. Mulling over the details of what I saw last night, some things didn't mesh. Something about the position of her hands bothered me.

She was going through the same motions as I turned on the lights. Having already witnessed her death, I wasn't so spooked as intrigued by her. The eyes that now followed every move I made weren't on my mind so much as her pose at the instant of her death.

I saw that her hands were wrapped around something invisible that was as large as her arm. Something about the way her thumbs jerked downward just before she was blown back made me realize what had really happened here. I was almost sure what she wanted with me, but I needed Joshua here to confirm my suspicions.

I wasn't surprised to see the astonished look on his face when he saw me standing in the doorway of her death-room.

As he marched over to me, a frown on his face, he said "What were you doing in that room?"

I calmly replied, "I was discovering a dirty little secret."

I stepped into the room just as Joshua reached for my arm. He followed me in. He didn't see the replaying death, but I did. "Best beloved" had her eyes fixed on him now.

Looking him square in the eye, I said, "What happened to your wife?"

"Sylvia? I don't..." suddenly jolted by my statement, he froze as he suddenly balled up his fists.

I smiled, pleased that I finally got past his cold denial, and said, "I'll tell you what happened to her. She died. Because of you."

His face flared into instant red-flushed rage. "What the fuck are you talking about? I didn't put a gun to her head!"

I sighed. "Humans are social creatures, Mister Keller. When they are rejected or ignored by their mates, they can die of loneliness, like some animals of the forest. You killed her, but not with a gun. You killed her with your

coldness."

His fists released into limp hands. I had hit home.

"That's it, isn't it? Didn't she leave a note nearby to tell you why she did herself in? I understand humans are prone to do that before they kill themselves."

He wasn't next to me anymore. He was in a blood-spattered room reading Sylvia's suicide note over and over. It was his denial, that her death was the result of his apathy, the same take-but-not-give attitude that he used on me that kept her in this room. She couldn't take being treated like an object, so when she died he decided to buy a female that, according to law, *was* an object. I wondered that if I didn't find out his little lie, would I be the next one to pull the trigger on myself?

He soon came back to the present. Falling to his knees, he was too stunned to even ask me how I found out the truth. His face was wet with tears as he whimpered, "Sylviaaaa..." I found it hard to feel sorry for him. At first. One thing that humans fail to understand about my kind is that with their gift of intelligence, we comprehended that the value of companionship goes beyond mere breeding urges or pack-hunts. How ironic that one as young as I would have to teach another as old as he about such a simple thing.

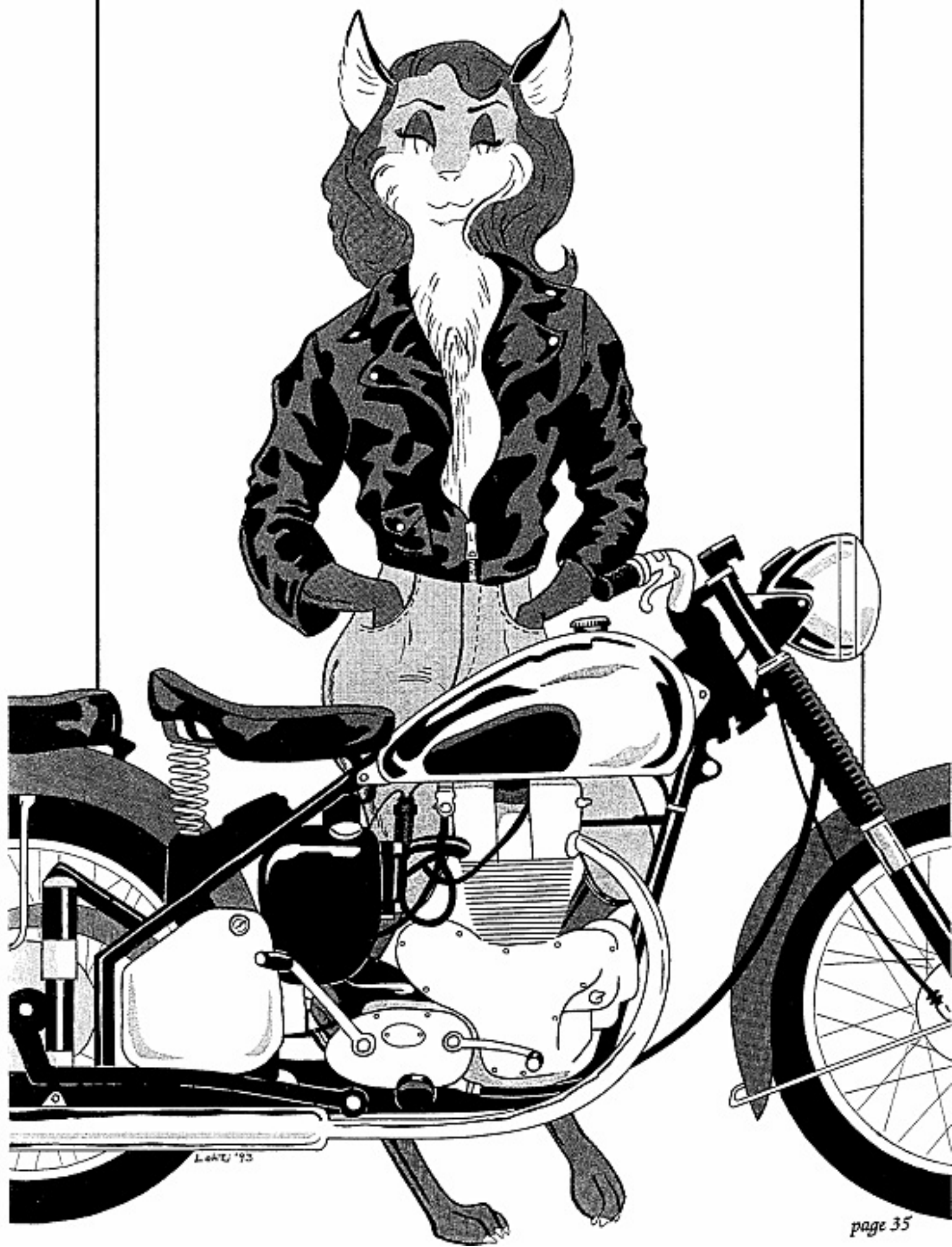
As he wept, as I held him while he mourned, I noticed that Sylvia had disappeared, perhaps happy with the results she had wrought. I couldn't say then whether he could change for the better at all. I'd like to think so. He was still my master, and he needed me, really needed me now. Maybe later we would be more than just servant and master. There's no telling. Nothing is certain in this world.

Humans are, after all, always odder than anything, or anyone, that comes from a factory. ☹





Nov. 21
TG
393





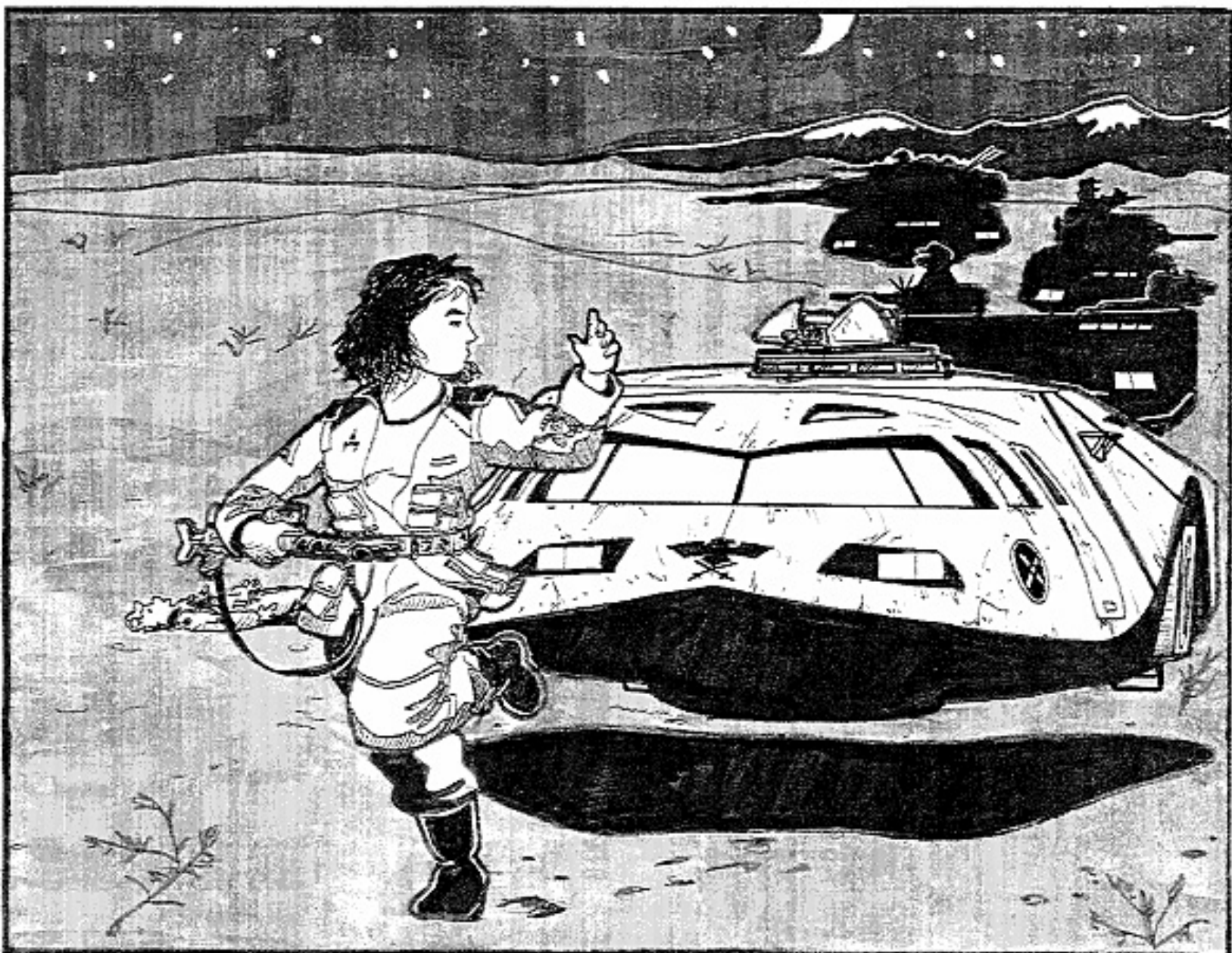
EMPIRES

© 1992-1993 by CHRIS GRANT

« ANOTHER PICKUP?
VEHICLE NUMBER AND
DISPATCH...! »

« SURE. MOMENT, PLEASE... »

ART/STORY:
CHRIS GRANT
—
LETTERING:
DEBBIE
KIDDER
—
BACKGROUND
INKS/WASHES:
AERYN SUMMERS



SIR! WE'RE AT THEIR
SECONDARY AMMO DUMP.

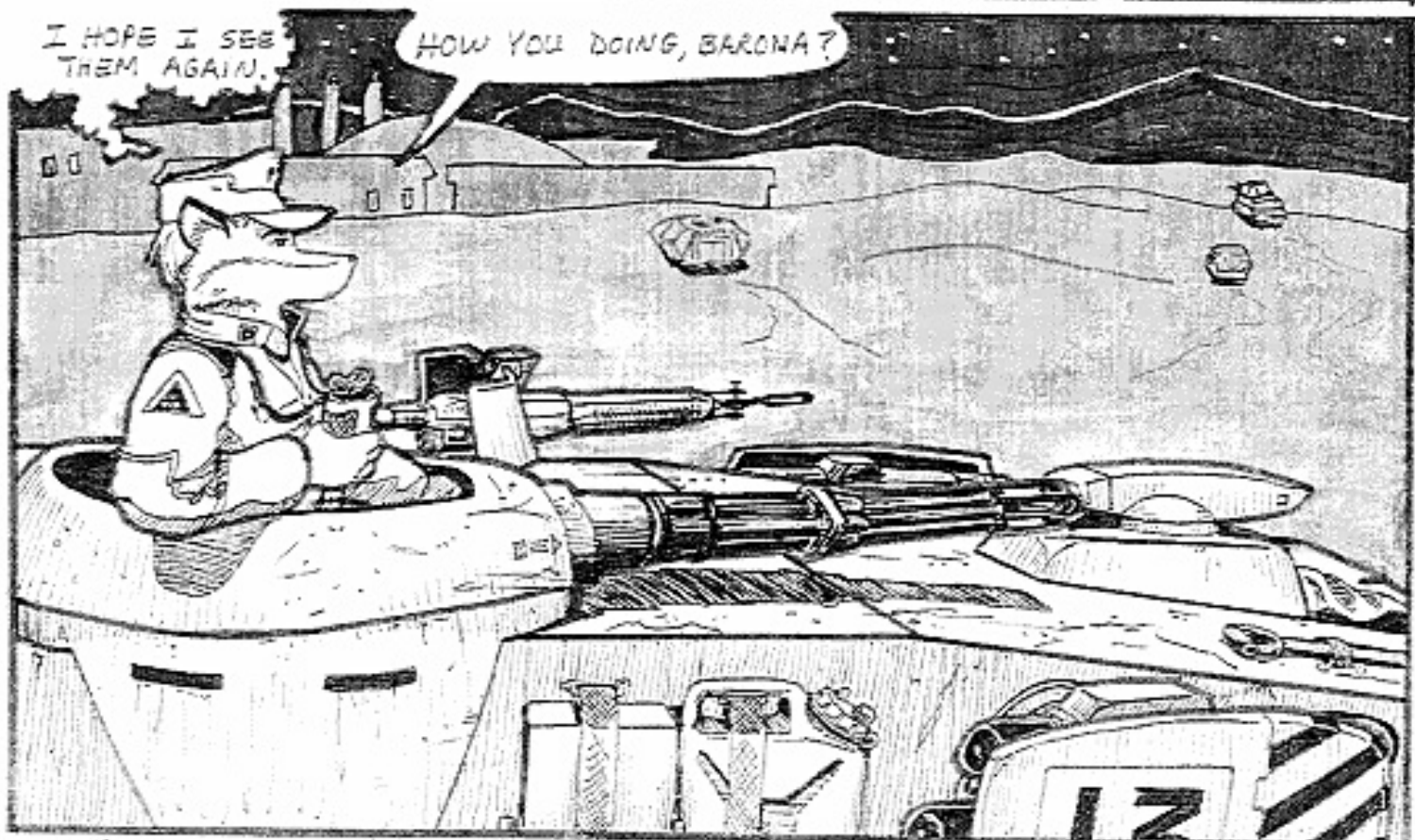


GODD. PLANT THE CHARGES AND GET
TO THE POLICE STATION. APATZIA WILL
GET YOU IN. RELEASE THOSE PRISONERS.



CHARGES SET! WE'LL DETONATE THEM
WHEN WE SECURE THE STATION. GOOD
LUCK WITH THE ARTILLERY.



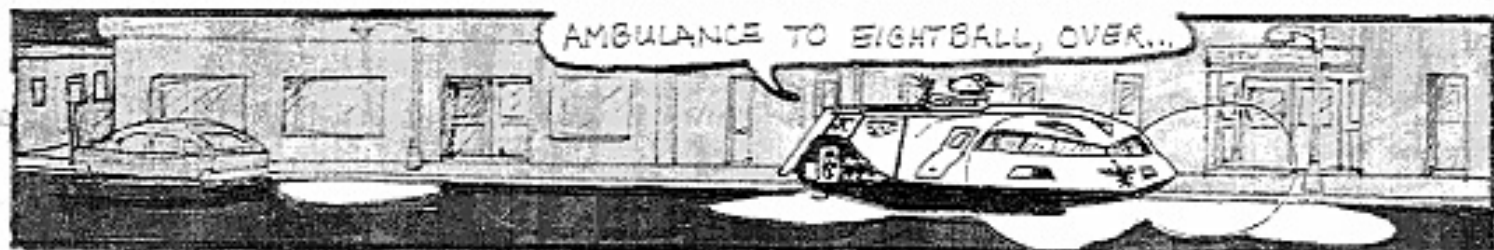




NOT BAD, FEELS LIKE I EXERCIZED TOO MUCH, IS ALL. DOC SAYS I HAVE NO WORRY...



UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES, AT LEAST.



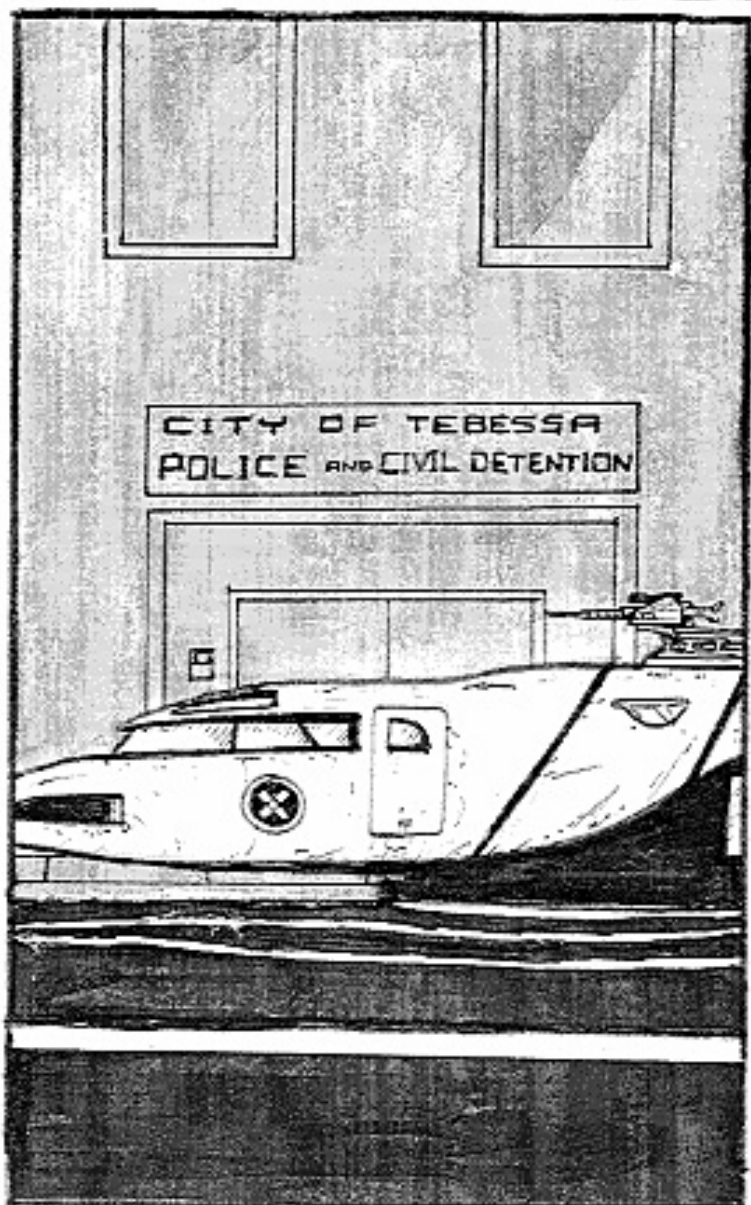
AMBULANCE TO EIGHTBALL, OVER...



EIGHTBALL HERE, WE'RE ENTERING THE FAR END OF THE STREET, OVER...



I'VE CIRCLED THE STATION, AND THERE'S A POLICE GARAGE YOU CAN HIDE IN, TO THE REAR OF THE BUILDING. WE'LL TAKE THE FRONT DOOR AND LET YOU IN.



DO YOUR STUFF,
APATSIA.

KYA.

KLICK

FRONT DESK,
OFFICER CHEVIER.
WHAT CAN I DO FOR
YOU?

MEDICAL SPECIALIST
APATSIA, IMPERIAL
ARMY...

WE HAVE SOME CENTRAL
PRISONERS SEATED IN OUR
AMBULANCE. COULD YOU
OPEN THE GARAGE DOORS
SO WE CAN TRANSFER
THEM OVER TO YOU?

SURE. DOOR'S UNLOCKED
NOW. YOU'LL HAVE TO
COME IN HERE TO SIGN
SOME PAPERWORK, SPECIALIST.

WE JUST NEED YOUR
SIGNATURE RELEASING
RESPONSIBILITY FOR--

WHAT THE--!?

POWER

VOL+

VOL-

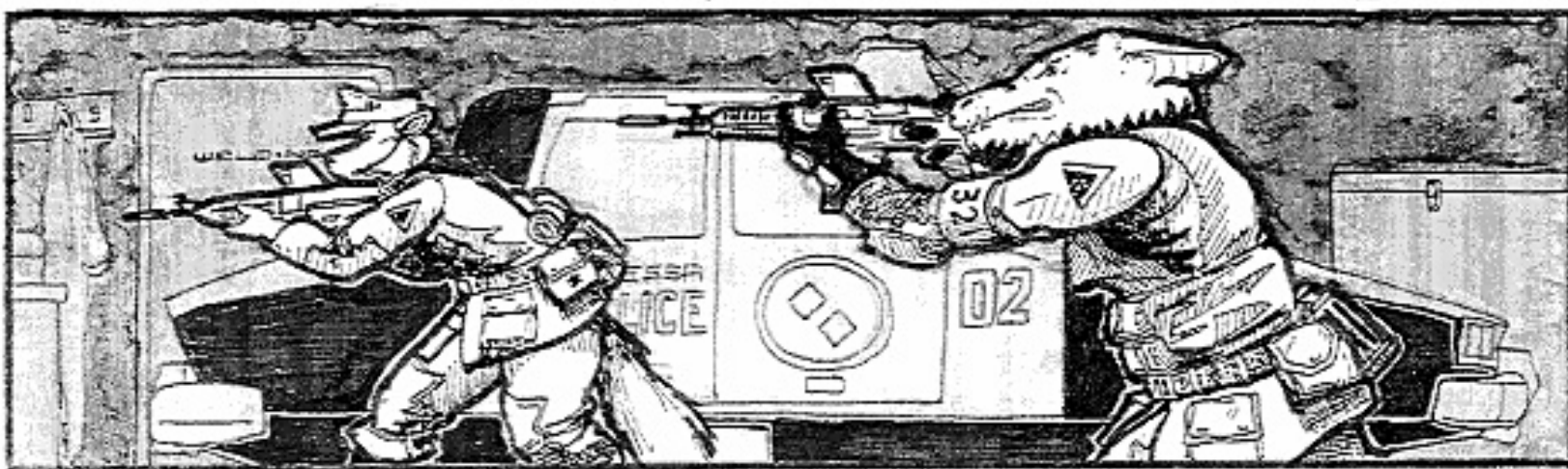
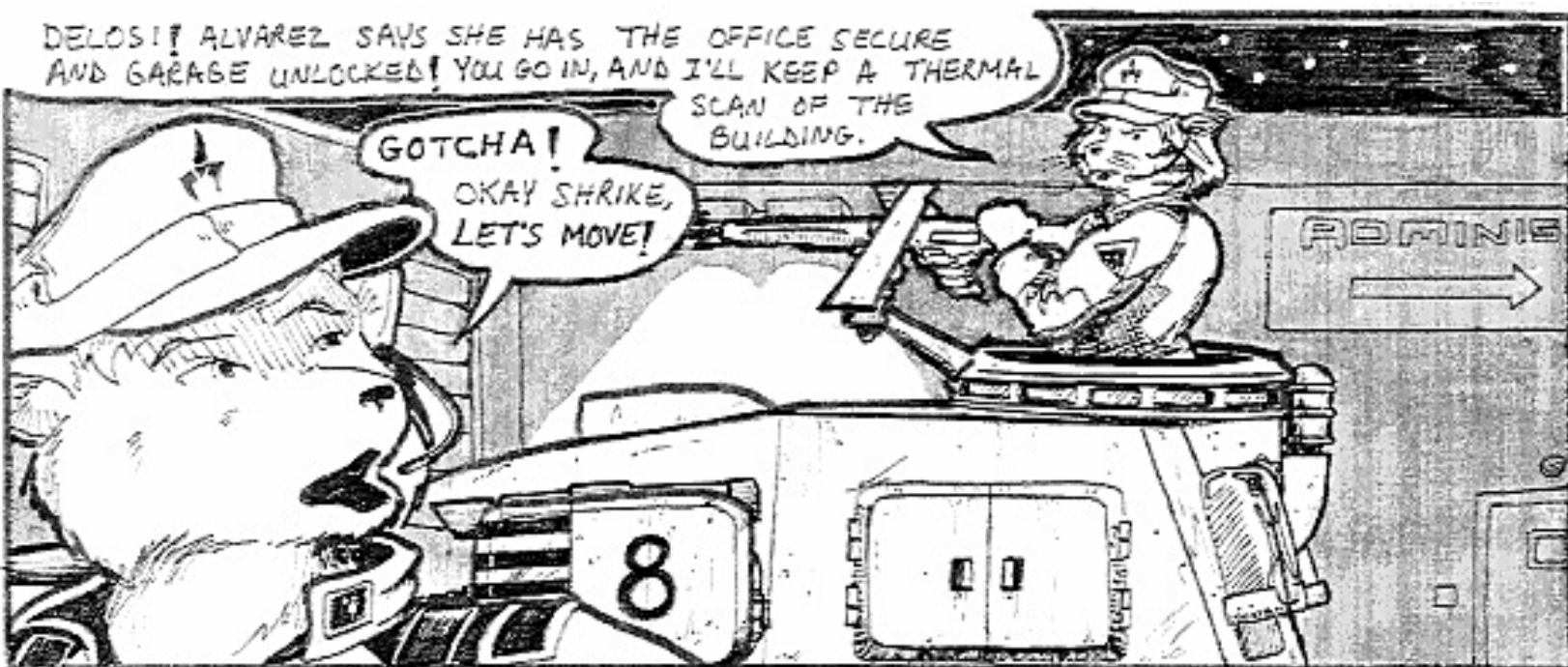
REC

BLANK

MUTE

CHEVIER

POPOPOW!



TWO HEAT
SOURCES, NEXT
ROOM



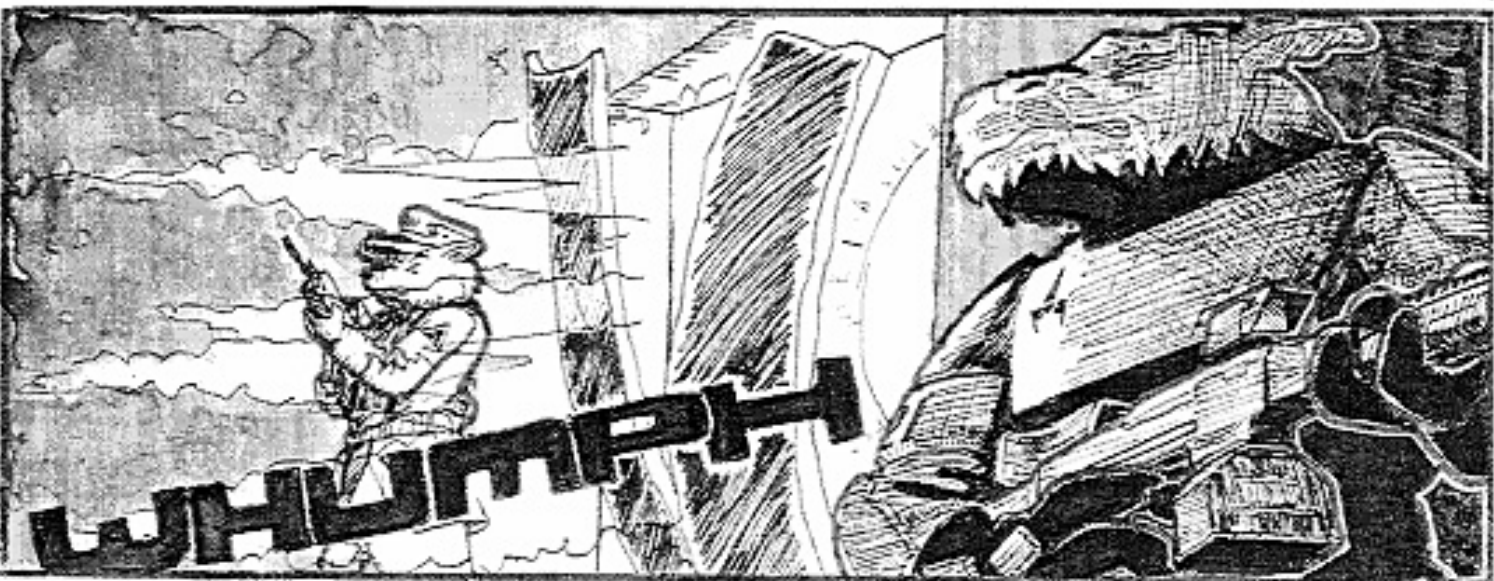
WE'RE READY.



WARNING
UNAUTHORIZED
PERSONS

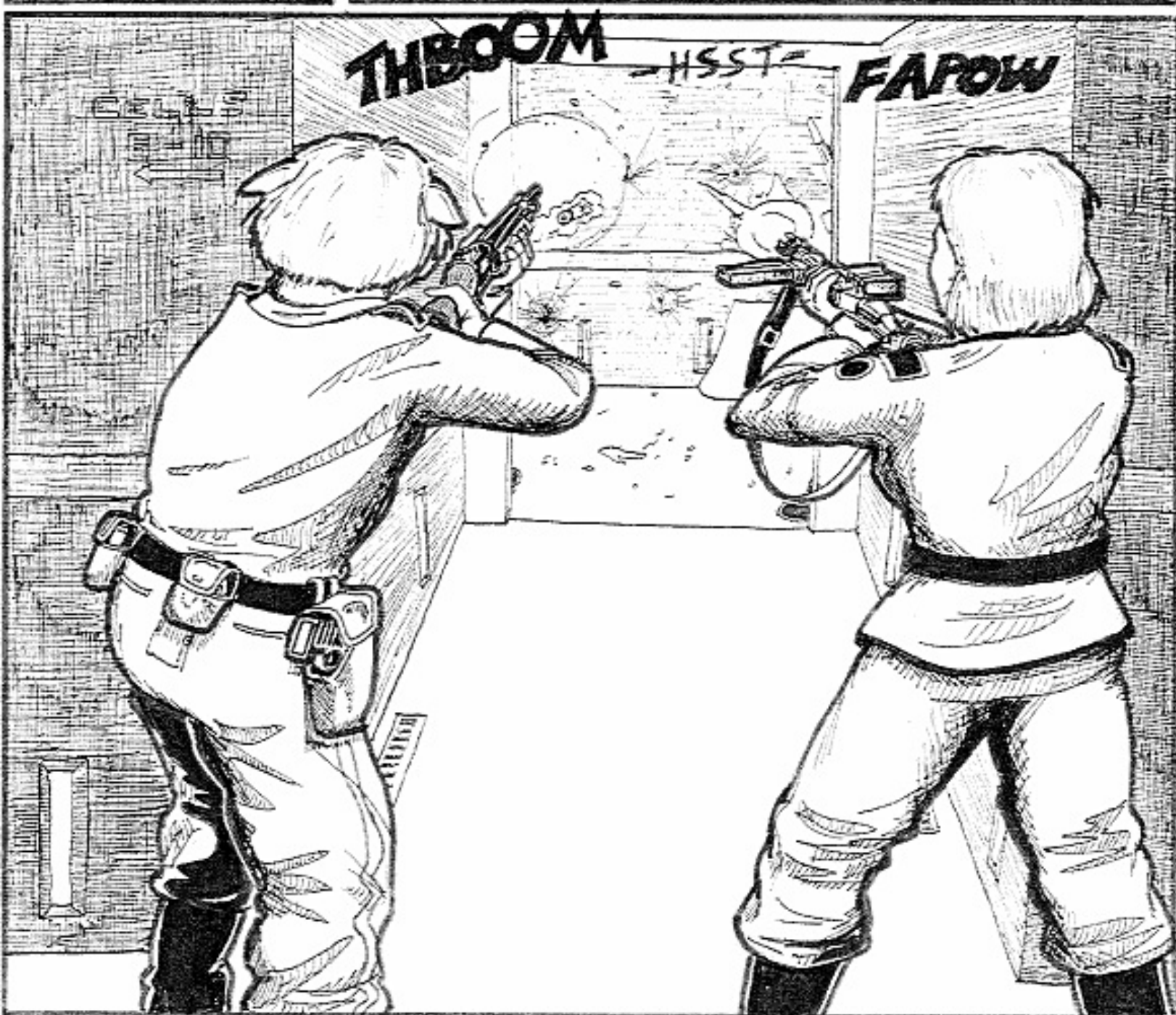
DETENTION
FACILITY

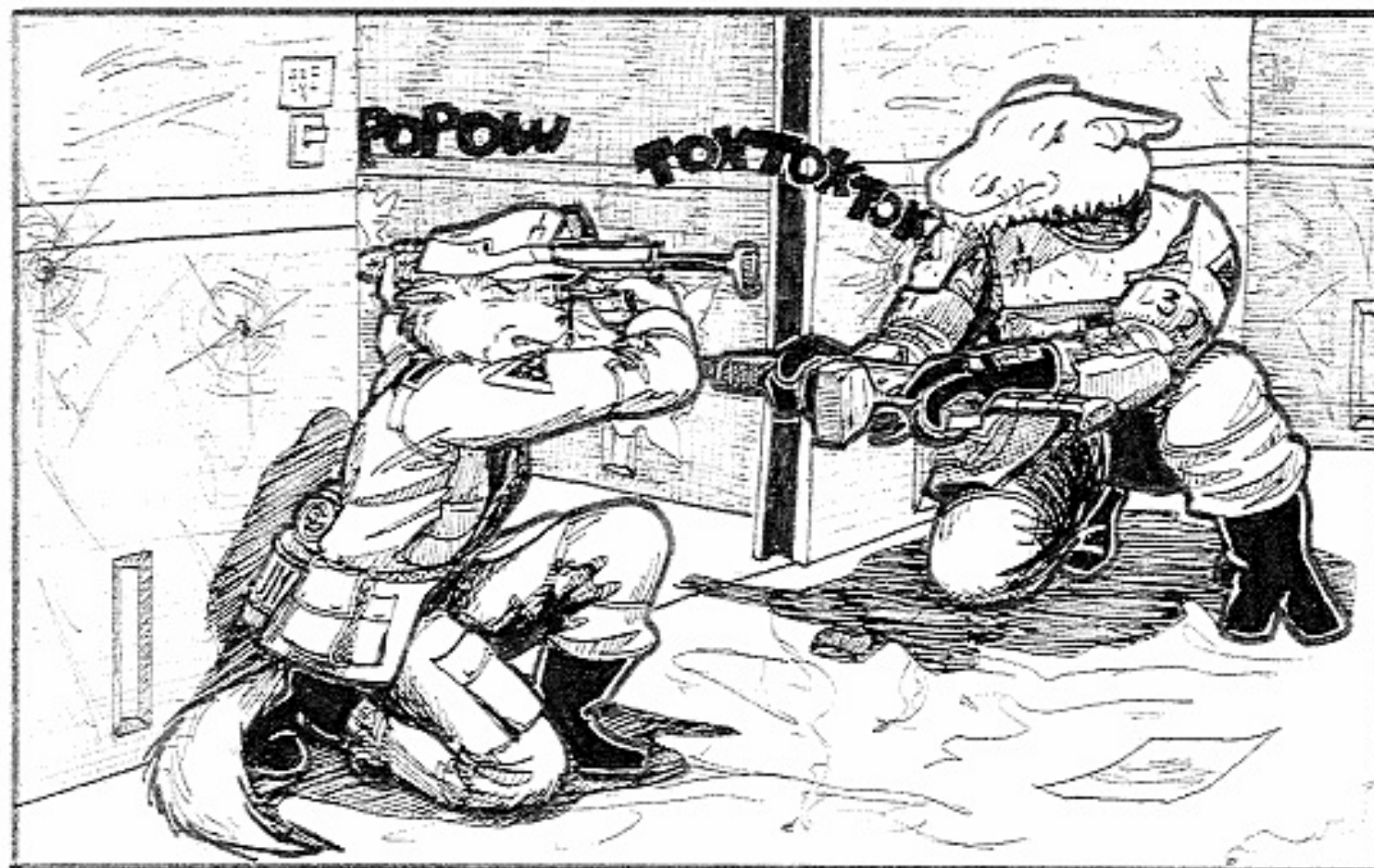
321

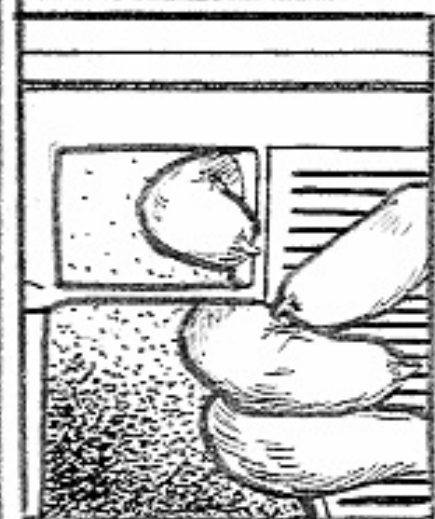
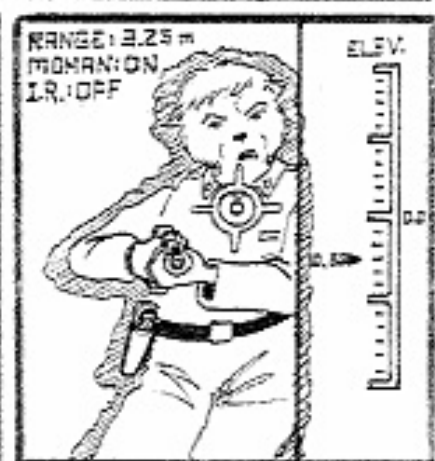
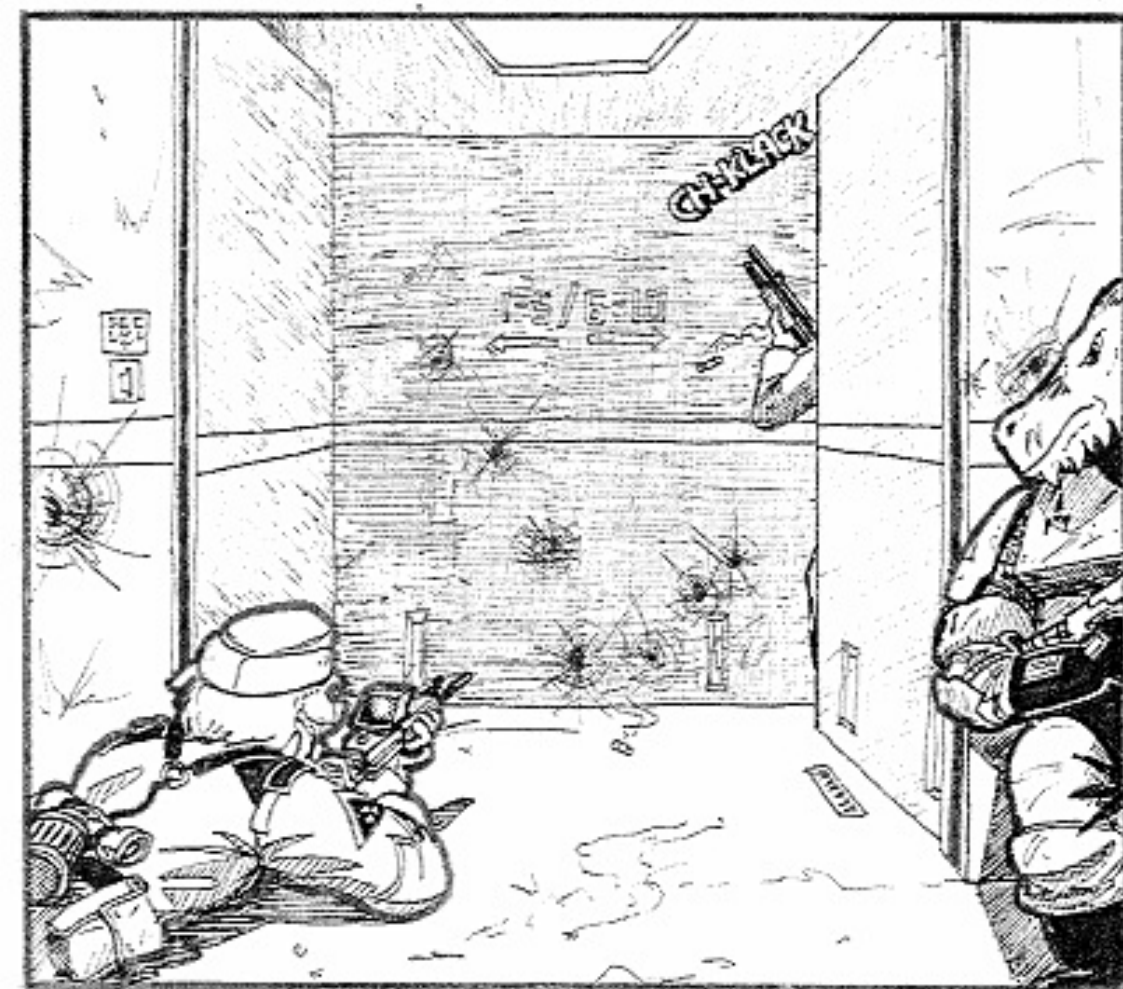
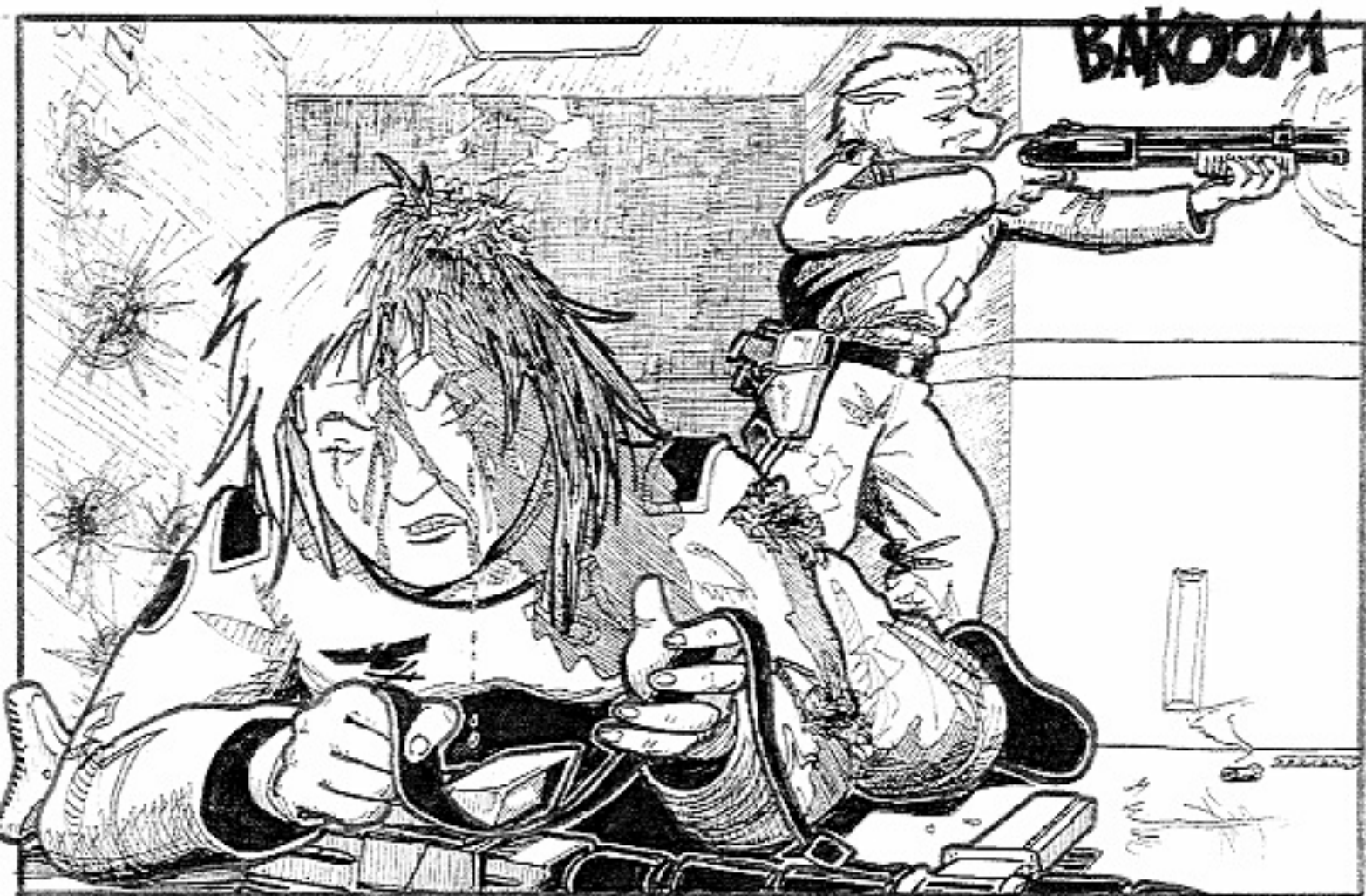


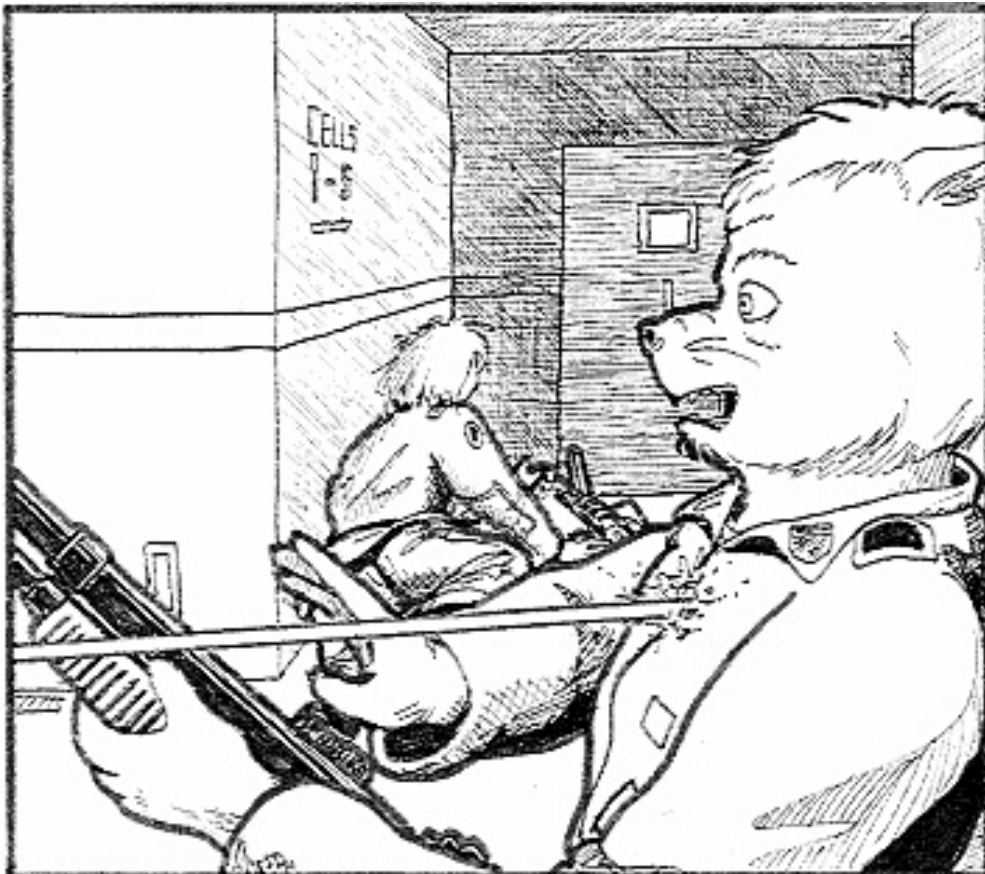


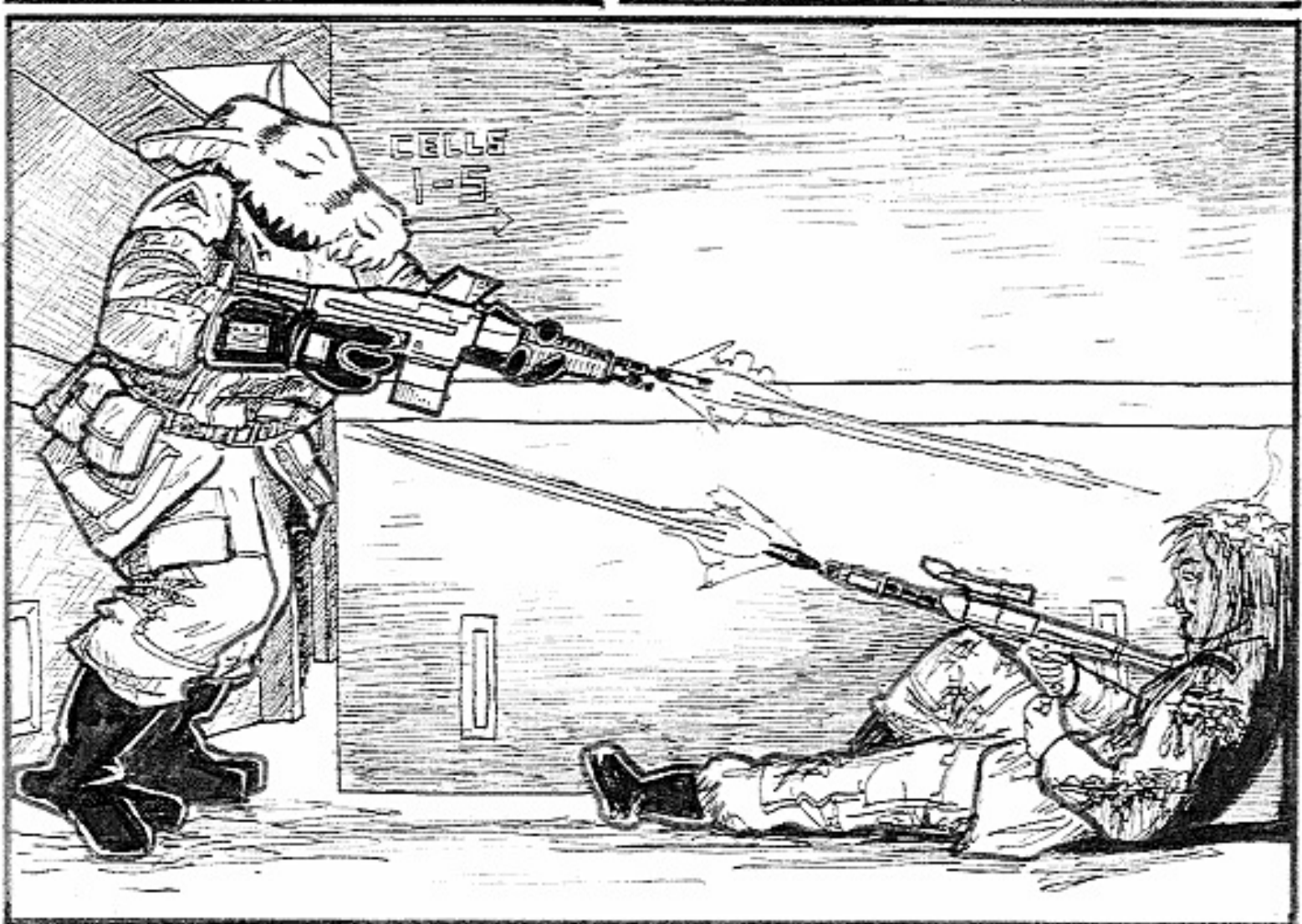
ROGER. TWO MORE
HEAT SOURCES IN
NEXT HALL.

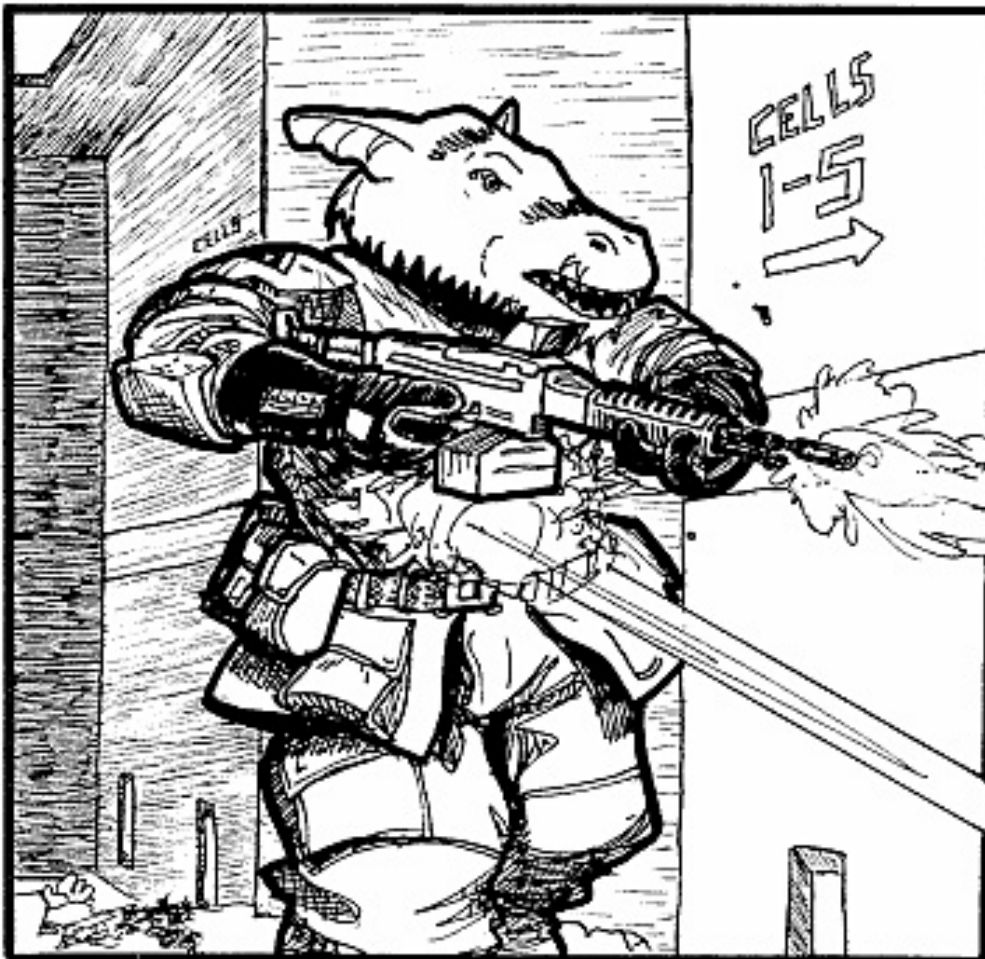












TAKE MORE THAN THAT TO KILL SHRIKE ...

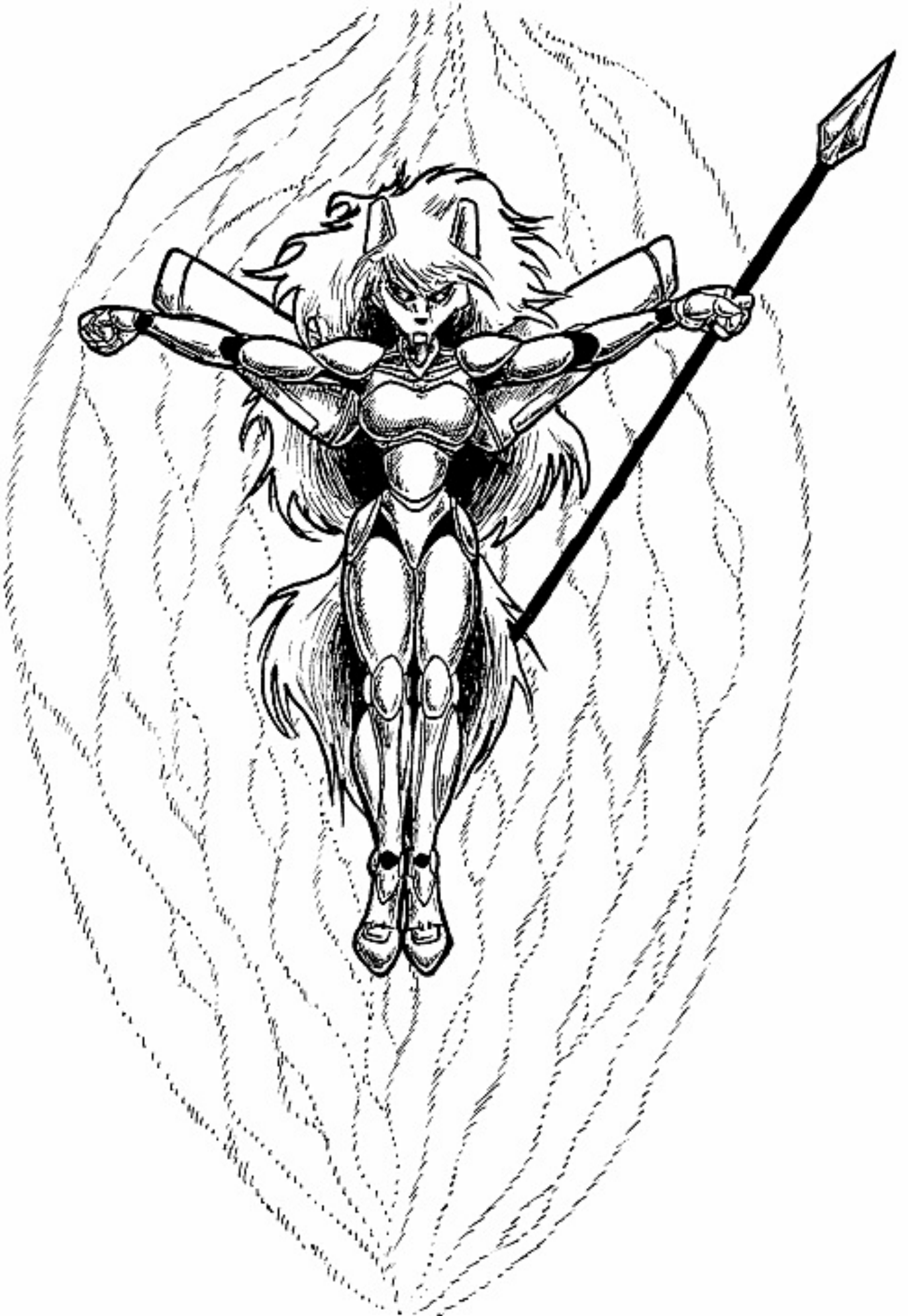
... HURT LIKE THOUSAND HELLS, THOUGH.



LET'S GET YOU PATCHED UP, THEN... AND WE'LL RELEASE THE PRISONERS...!

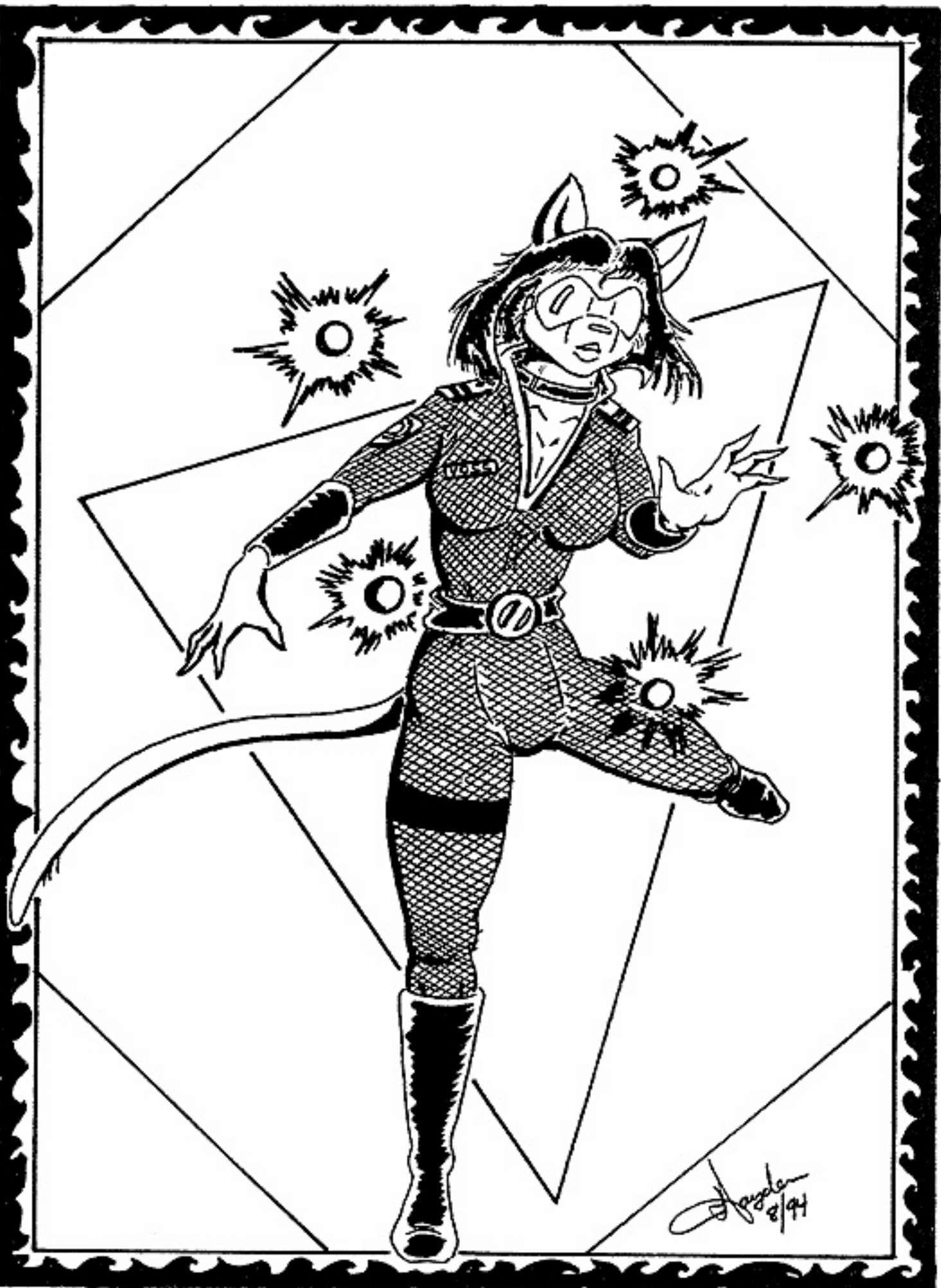


CONTINUED...



S E L I R A - III

ART © 1995
I. G. F.



SUCH A BURNING DESIRE

PART ONE

BY MICHAEL PAYNE

"Quitting time, love."

"Yeah, yeah." Chelisse flipped a few pages in her notebook, sure she had a note somewhere about the melted glass.

Lorenz's paw appeared and gently took the notebook away.

"Eighteen o'clock, Chelisse. Time for all good weasels to punch out and go home."

"I'll let all good weasels know." She snatched for the notebook but met empty air, Lorenz a bit too fast; she sighed, swiveled her chair around and gave him a little glare: not a big glare — he hadn't done anything but be cute so far — but a glare nonetheless. "As for me," she went on, "Fin has personally promised to shave me as bald as he is if I don't have something about this arson case on his desk in the morning." She held out a paw. "So, if a certain kitty cat would rather not join me in my hairlessness..."

Lorenz rubbed his chin. "Well, I would hate to see this lovely pelt damaged." He set the notebook into her claws. "I don't see what the hurry is; you've been working on this for, what, three weeks now without a single clue?"

Chelisse couldn't keep her lips from pulling back. "Yes, thank you so much for reminding me how well I've been doing."

His ears twitched. "Chelisse, you know I didn't —"

"How three more ski resorts have burned to the ground while I've stood here without, as you so eloquently put it, a clue. How the local business groups, the city council, the press, and our very own furless leader have been breathing down my neck for the past month to get this clown before the first snow falls and we have to worry about people being up at those resorts. How everything I've done leads me right back to nothing, and how overjoyed I am to be a part of this wonderful organization we call EMS!"

Lorenz's ears and eyes flickered down for a second, then came up back up. "I'm sorry, Chelisse. Is there anything I can do to help?"

And he just looked so earnest, his brown eyes so soft and sweet, she couldn't keep her anger from trickling away. "Not really, love." She blew out a breath. "Go on home. One of us might as well get some use out of that bed tonight."

He took her paw, pressed it to his lips. "That's what happens when you're the best, you know. They keep giving you the cases no one else would have a chance with."

With a snort, she spun her chair back around, shoulders tightening at the paperwork spread over her desk. "I'd rather be working that missing kid thing you got today, get out in the streets, nose around a little. This stuff," she tossed her notebook into the mess, "just makes me gag."

"Well, wrap your arsonist up, then." She heard him padding toward the door. "We've just started the search for the McTeague girl, and I'd be glad to have you on the team."

She gave him a look over her shoulder. "Weren't you leaving?"

"I was indeed." He blew a kiss from the doorway. "Now stop fretting. You'll do fine, Chelisse. You always do." And he disappeared around the corner.

"Yeah, yeah." She turned back to the desk, to the paperwork, to the impossible: six ski resorts in the mountains west of Coxe Hill burning to the ground in the last month with no chemical residue, no bits of any incendiary device, nothing but charred wood, melted glass, and half-slugged beams just like every other structure fire she'd ever investigated.

Except that these six weren't like any structure fires she'd ever investigated. Her own observations, the descriptions from the fire crews, the story she'd gotten from the five security guards who'd escaped the last incident earlier this week, all pointed to a fire that had absolutely engulfed each building, spreading hot and fast, destroying the resorts within a matter of minutes...

And then just dying out. In all six cases, nothing had gone up except the resorts themselves. Even at Pine Summit where the forest grew right up to one side of the main chalet, not a single tree had been touched, four slightly singed pine cones all Chelisse had been able to find. She had them in a box on the shelf beside her desk.

It had to be some sort of beam weapon, some speeder or other, agitating the walls at a molecular level till the heat build-up made the whole place spontaneously combust. And while she could almost imagine some nut stomping around the woods with a microwave speeder, blasting at ski resorts for grins, a microwaver couldn't turn the fire off the way these fires had apparently been doused.

No, only kinetic speeders shut down fires as quick as they started them, and kinetickers were so damn expensive and unwieldy, there were exactly two of them on the entire planet: one downtown at the Coxehill fire department — rusting, she had seen when she'd looked it over two weeks ago, because the city couldn't afford to power it up — and the other halfway around the world in the old weapons depot at Port Barnaby, sitting as it had for sixty years, Colonel Mortimer had personally assured her, under triple magnetic locks and constant guard.

And that was that: she couldn't figure out any way for this to be happening, yet it went on happening while she sat here staring at pieces of paper. At least no one had died yet, but the extra security hired by the owners of the seven remaining resorts meant more folks wandering around up there. And that meant it was only a matter of time.

She banged a fist against the desk and was picking up her notes from the first fire again when a throat cleared behind her, a throat she knew very well. "If it isn't morning, Lorenz," she said without turning, "I don't want to see you."

"But you have a visitor." Barely suppressed laughter made his voice dance. "I found him lurking about in the parking lot. He insisted on seeing you."

Chelisse wheeled around, saw him leaning against the doorjamb, opened her mouth to yell at him, but stopped when a familiar odor touched her nose. She blinked. "Stumpy?"

"Damnation, Lissy!" The old lizard clumped around Lorenz and into the room, dust drifting from the ancient serapé around his shoulders. "Whyn't ya set yerself up where a body could find ya?" He collapsed into the chair at Jekert's desk. "I been walkin' since afore sundown, an' I'd still be walkin' if it hadn'ta been fer Larry's perfume here." He waved a claw at Lorenz. "Reeks like nothin' else I know, so I figgered I was gittin' close."

It was almost a physical shock, seeing him somewhere other than that decaying shack out in the west valley: she'd sooner have expected a chunk of the mountain to come strolling into her office. "Stumpy, what are you doing here? You haven't come into the east valley since —"

"Since the las' time ya dragged me down here!" His head snapped over to Lorenz. "No offense, Larry: ya cooks a mean buncha grub, an' the two o' ya treated this ol' miner better'n he had any right t' expect." He turned back to Chelisse and stuck out his lower jaw. "But damnation, Lissy! I got as much right as the nex' feller to come lookin' for the EMS, ain't I? An' here I hasta come practic'ly into damn town to find ya! Ain't come into Coxehill on mah own fer nigh onta eighty years, an' now —"

"Stumpy, look." Chelisse forced herself to stay sitting,

forced her paws to unclench, forced the thought of leaping over and throttling him out of her mind. "I'd love to chat, really, but I've got a big arson case to —"

"I ain't dumb, girl! Tha's what I come t' talk t' ya about! Christ Awmighty, the way ya goes on, a feller cain't git a word in edgewise! Never met a weasel as talked —"

"Whoa, whoa, whoa." A chill touched Chelisse's neck. "You know something about these resorts burning down?"

The lizard squinted at her. "Ain't I been tryin' t' say tha the past five minnits?"

Chelisse gritted her teeth. "Stumpy..."

He crooked a thumb over his shoulder. "Don't I know them mountains better'n anybody livin' or dead? Ain't I seen things up there all sudden-like as makes mah scales clatter, things as I ain't never seen in all mah born days, things as didn't start turnin' up till all them fires started?" He blinked over dry black eyes. "Well? Didn't I?"

Chelisse tried to keep her voice calm. "You've got to tell me, Stumpy. Now, what kind of things? Were they —"

"Ain'tcha been lis'nin', Lissy? I ain't never seen nothing like 'em! But I could smell the fire, all over up there, an' tha's why I come t' find ya! 'Cuz yer s'posed t' be the EMS 'round here, ain'tcha?" He pointed a shaking claw at her. "Well, start EMSin'!"

Chelisse had never seen the old lizard so agitated. She got up, moved across the room, knelt down beside him. "Can you show me, Stumpy? Take me up to wherever they are?"

Stumpy blew out a breath. "Well, o' course I can! Tha's what I come down here fer in the first place!"

She looked at Lorenz. "You up for some radio work?"

He saluted. "That's my job, ma'am." He whirled on his toes and marched out into the hallway.

She turned back to the lizard. "So how close can we get driving?"

"Up to Bonhar's Roundin'. From there, we'd hafta hoof it." He slid from the chair. "But I ain't about to tangle with this stuff: I ain't EMS, y'know, an' I'll be damned if'n I'll go back —"

"Fine. You can stay in the car." She pulled at a desk drawer, rummaged around till she found a set of car keys. "I just need you to point me in the right direction." She gestured to the doorway. "After you."

Chelisse followed him down the hall and around the corner till they came to the radio room. "Hold on a minute, Stumpy." She stuck her head in, saw Lorenz snapping lights on at the secondary console, Jekert pouring himself some of his dreaded coffee. She nodded to the squirrel. "Hope you don't mind us making your life more complicated."

jecket shrugged, his bushy tail twitching over his head, drained his cup, and filled it again. "After seven cups of this, I don't have a problem with anything."

Lorenz laughed, settled the headset over his ears. "As long as it doesn't creep out of the pot and strangle me."

"I make no promises." The squirrel swigged the stuff down, smacked his lips, and poured himself another cup. "Hey, if you don't have to chew it, how good can it be?"

"No comment." Lorenz poked a few more buttons, then turned to Chelisse. "We'll use a delta scramble pattern, love, starting with channel 46. That ought to keep whomever's out there from hearing us should they happen to be scanning our regular frequencies."

"Right." Chelisse wagged a thumb at him, ducked back into the hallway, and collected Stumpy. "Let's go."

It was full night outside; Chelisse pushed past the doors and started down the steps, a chill in the air that could only be winter on the way. "Blasted weather," she heard Stumpy mutter behind her. "This car o' yers better have a heater, Lissy, tha's all I'll say."

"I somehow doubt that," she muttered, turning the corner and starting across the parking lot.

"Ya what?"

"It's right over here, Stumpy." She pulled open the passenger door on the least rusty groundcar, held it for him till the old lizard had waddled up. "You sure you'll be able to find the place in the dark?"

He snapped a sour look up at her. "Jes' worry yerself with drivin' this crate. I'll worry 'bout gittin' us there." He clambered up into the long front seat. "What kinda greenhorn ya take me fer, askin' questions like that? Why, back in '04, me an' Dingo Pierce..."

Chelisse closed the door, padded around the car, climbed in behind the wheel, and Stumpy was still going on: "...but, hell! Wasn't much I could do 'bout that, an' I tol' Dingo so. Well, he jes' gimme that look o' his, an'..."

She started the car up, flipped on the lights, and pulled out of the lot. "Scuse me a minute, Stumpy." She clicked the radio, grabbed the handset. "EMS 1, this is EMS 7. Come in, please."

"EMS 1," Lorenz's voice came back. "Go ahead, EMS 7."

"Ready to begin pattern on your mark, love." Chelisse snapped the handset back into its clip and slipped her paw over the buttons for programming the scramble sequence.

"Roger that, EMS 7. Pattern in three, two, one, mark."

She punched in channel 46, entered the code for a delta pattern, and took up the handset again. "EMS 1, do you copy?"

The static whirled and whistled the way it always did

of it. "That I do. I'll get some maps pulled for the Bonhar's Rounding area. No doubt it looks a bit different in the dark."

"Roger that." Chelisse slowed, rock walls catching the car's headlights now, the road winding into Box Canyon and the switchbacks down the side of the cliff to the Barrows Road. "Stumbling around those hills in the middle of the night... I don't know, Lorenz. I'd almost say we should wait till morning for all this."

The radio crackled. "You'd get no argument from me."

She tapped a claw against the wheel, sniffed the cold air, thought about the paperwork on her desk. "But, hey, if there is actually anything out there that relates to —"

"Lissy!" Stumpy gaped at her. "Yer not thinkin' I made it all up, are ya?"

Chelisse sighed. "No, Stumpy. It's just, I mean, yes, you've smelled smoke. And you've seen these things, whatever they are. But, well, it's just possible, isn't it, that they don't have anything to do with my arson case?"

His gape slowly became a scowl, then he crossed his arms and faced forward. "I shoulda knowed you wouldn't believe me. Jes' a crazy ol' coot, tha's me, ain't it?"

"Stumpy..." The road was getting steeper, the switchbacks coming closer together. Chelisse thumbed the handset. "Look, Lorenz, I've got driving to do here. I'll call you when we get to the Rounding. EMS 7, out." She snapped the handset back into its holder and concentrated on the road, winding first to the west, only darkness visible past the rocks in the headlights, then switching back to the east, the lights of Coxehill glowing below and ahead.

Back and forth, back and forth, the lights seeming to draw closer with each pass, till Box Canyon Road emptied onto the Barrows Road. Town shone orange and white about half a mile to her right, but Chelisse flipped on her left turnsignal, eased the car out onto the road, and headed into the darkness to the west. "Bonhar's Rounding, you said?"

Stumpy only grunted, his arms still crossed in front of him, and Chelisse turned her attention to the road again, her conscience twinging just a bit. Oh, well. At least she'd found a way to keep him quiet.

The cliff rushed by on the left, scrub pines flashing in the headlights to her right. Every once in a while, a dirt road would split off through the pines, leading down to the river and the shacks of the few folks who still lived out here, old miners or their descendants who hadn't moved to town after the mines stopped paying; Stumpy's cabin on its rocky outcropping was down one of these, but in the dark, Chelisse couldn't see the landmarks she usually used to find it.

Then the cliff pulled away suddenly, metal flashing ahead, and they were driving out onto the new bridge. The collapse of the Barrows Dam had wiped out this stretch of road completely, a stream now tumbling out of the canyon and into the Parini, but Harian and her crew had gotten the bridge up in record time. They'd even held a dedication ceremony before dawn the morning of the official opening, all the beavers gathered, Harian's buck-teeth shining as she'd handed Chelisse the scissors to cut the ribbon: folks back at the office had already started calling it the T.K. Chelisse Memorial Bridge.

Not that the name would appear on any map: the City Council would never name a bridge after an anthrop. But Chelisse still had to smile every time she drove over it.

Past the bridge, the road started winding up away from the river and into the hills. On a sunny day with Lorenz and a lunch basket beside her, Chelisse loved this drive. After dark, when the bends in the road always seemed to sneak up on her, however, it made her grit her teeth till her jaw hurt.

Eventually, though, the way straightened a bit, bringing them past the old mining camp, now more a picnic ground than anything else. The road continued into the hills to the mines themselves, all blocked up long ago, and Chelisse followed it, ski resorts and hiking trails the only things up here now.

They came to the Barrows Resort then, or at least to the burnt-out shell that was left of it. Further up, they passed Warm Springs Lodge, then the remains of the Wisteria Inn, the "police line" ribbons still strung across its driveway. Turnoffs led to the other chalets Chelisse had visited lately, but she kept to the main road, turning south now and winding along the mountainside, rocky cliffs rising on the right and black nothingness falling away on her left.

At last, the road in her headlights widened into a circular parking lot. Turning left and pulling into a space, she took up the handset. "EMS 1, this is EMS 7 — come in, please."

The radio crackled. "EMS 1 here. Go ahead, Chelisse."

"Well, we've arrived, Lorenz. You got those maps up?"

"Right here, love."

"Stand by." Chelisse killed the engine, flicked off the lights, and scooted around to face Stumpy. "Where to now?"

The old lizard grunted, a sound and shape in the sudden quiet darkness. "Don't really matter, do it? Ya think I'm crazy, somebbe I am. Mebbe I didn't see nothin'. Mebbe I —"

"Stumpy..." She reached over, put a paw on his shoulder, his serapé gritty under her pads. "If I didn't believe you, would I come stumbling out here in the middle of the

night?"

"Don't rightly know." Chelisse thought she saw his eyes dart over. "Mebbeyer jes' humorin' a ol' idiot. Or mebbe yer tryin' to get outta that desk work back at yer office. Cain't say as how I knows what all goes on inside that brain o' yers, Lissy."

"All right, I'm sorry." She blew out a breath. "I'm just trying out all the angles. Something's out here, sure, but the question is, 'What?' And I can't answer that unless you help me. So c'mon, Stumpy." She squeezed his shoulder again. "Don't go all sour on me right when I need you."

For a moment, he didn't move, then she felt his shoulder sag slightly. "Well, if yer gonna come all over mushy...." He turned and pointed out the driver's-side window. "Ya know the Pascomb Trail?"

Chelisse shuffled around, looked out into the Rounding, the starlight just enough for her to fill in her memory of the place: a round patch of concrete with one side looking out over the Parini valley, a pawful of hiking trails leading up into the mountains from the other sides. The Pascomb Trail, Chelisse seemed to remember, started at the far end of the Rounding and wound southeast into the heart of the range. She nodded, her eyes still on the darkened brush at the other end of the lot.

"Well, tha's the trail ya takes. 'Bout a klick up into things, ya'll come to a place where the ol' trail's been blocked by a lan'slide... this were on about forty years ago now. The rangers, they broke a new trail 'round about it, but ya don' wanna take that trail. Jes' scramble right up over the top o' the slide's what'cha do."

She looked back at him. "Come again?"

"Oh, now, Lissy, it ain't all that difficult." His already wrinkled snout wrinkled even further. "I goes over the thing all the time."

"At night?"

He blinked. "Well, no. Cain't say as how I've ever climbed 'er in the dark." He shrugged. "But yer younger'n me by a fair piece — shouldn't be too much a stretch, an' it's only 'bout twenty meters t' the top."

"Twenty meters? Up a rock slide? In the dark?"

He glared at her. "Damnation, Lissy! Cain'cha lemme finish mah thought? Christ Awmighty! The way ya carries on, ya'd think I was askin' ya to —"

"All right, all right!" Chelisse ran her tongue over her teeth, tried to lick away the sudden metallic taste. "So I get up this twenty-meter rock slide. Then what?"

"Well, then ya goes over the top an' down into the valley back there." He sighed. "Always was mah fav'rite part o' the trail, an' now this's the only way t' git to 'er."

"Wait a minute." She crooked a thumb over her shoul-

der. "Couldn't I just go down the new trail to where it meets the old one, then double back?"

Stumpy shook his head. "Trail useta go 'round the south side o' Pascomb Peak, y'see, but the lan'slide blocked it off so bad, the rangers had to cut the new trail 'round the north side. Ya'd hafta walk nigh onto thirty klicks till ya come to where the trails meet." He shrugged. "I ain't never seen the need to do that when it's jes' a little scramble over a rockfall to get in from this side."

"Fine." All that paperwork was looking better and better. "Then what?"

"Well, then yer there. Ya can smell the fires what's been burnin' in the valley if'n ya cain't see 'em, an' all them things is up in there, too."

"About these things, Stumpy, can't you give me any —"

"No!" That same anxious tone crept into his voice. "I could say they was like rocks, but they ain't! I could say they was like bugs, but they ain't! I could say they was like machines, but they ain't like no machines I ever seen, an' I've rode ore crushers an' trailin' wagons through half these mountains!" He swallowed. "What I seen up in that valley, it ain't like nothin' I've ever seen the like of!" Chelisse could hear his teeth chattering, and he drew his serapé closer around himself. "Ya said ya had a heater in here, didn't ya?"

Chelisse blinked for a moment, then reached under the dashboard and switched on the heating coil. "It'll turn itself on and off, so don't mess with it." She looked at him, suddenly somehow older than she'd ever seen him. "You'll... you'll be all right here by yourself, won't you?"

He waved a claw at her. "Go on with ya. I brung ya up here — don't know what else I could do."

She patted his shoulder. "You'll be able to hear Lorenz and me over the radio, okay?"

Stumpy just nodded, slumped on the seat, his serapé held closed. Chelisse felt a sudden chill even as warm air began wafting up from beneath the dashboard. "Okay," she said. "Just rest. I'll be back quick as I can."

He didn't respond. Chelisse gave him another pat, slid out of the car, and opened the trunk. She dug out a headset, slaved it to the car's radio, fitted it over her ears and down to her snout. "EMS 1, this is EMS 7; come in please."

Static rolled through the set, and Lorenz's voice came out. "EMS 1. Go ahead, EMS 7."

She grabbed a tool belt, fastened it around her waist. "The Pascomb Trail, Lorenz. Apparently, I'm supposed to scale this landslide about a kilometer in. There's a valley back there that the trail used to pass through. Anything on the map about it?"

"Pascomb Trail..." She could hear the clicking of his

claws on a keyboard. "Ah, yes, here's the slide, right at the base of Pascomb Peak. Forty-four years ago. Looks like they had the same sort of summer we did: a series of small earthquakes culminating in some minor disaster, the landslide for them, the Barrows Dam collapse for us. The Pascomb seems to have been the only hiking trail in the area at the time.... Ah, yes, I see. The mines were still in operation back then."

Chelisse had started across the concrete while Lorenz talked. "Any report of slide activity from the quakes this summer?"

"None I can find, love. The area's been fairly quiet in the intervening years, looks like. Should be solid enough after all this time."

"Should be, huh?" Chelisse shivered, the cold of the night lapping at her fur. She stepped over the curb at the edge of the Rounding, fished the flashlight from her belt and pointed its red glow up to the guidepost. The Pascomb Trail, it said, began down the dirt road to her left. Tucking the light away and heading in that direction, she asked, "How about this valley south of Pascomb Peak?"

"Well, there's nothing on the map. Let's see what..." More clicking. "Ah, here's something called Crystal Falls, a valley where an underground river comes to light, tumbles along the trail for a while, then disappears back into the rock. Quite a lovely spot, it's described as." A bit of silence. "Strange. I don't find any talk about trying to unblock the trail after the landslide. The rangers just cut the new trail around the other side of the Peak."

"Well, maybe the landslide filled the whole valley in."

"Himm..." Static clattered. "If it was really such an attraction, someone would've gone in to take a look, don't you think? But there's no report, no surveys, no anything. In fact..." Again he stopped, so Chelisse turned her attention to the trail, marked well enough through the scrub pines and fissured cliffs, but she could just see herself stepping wrong in the dark, twisting her ankle, having to crawl back to the car. The horizon stood black and close and jagged against the sky, a dark mass ahead that had to be Pascomb Peak. Probably very scenic if she could see it.

The headset crackled. "Chelisse, this is all very odd."

"What, love?"

"Well, the information I'm pulling up about your valley: it's all coming from old memory dumps."

She sighed. Always the techie. "Which means what?"

"Which means someone dumped this information from the system forty years ago."

"Dumped?" Chelisse blinked. "You mean erased?"

"In a way. You see, the system they had back then dumped information it was told to erase, piling it all up in these little cores. They were basically inaccessible, and even if someone managed to hack his way in, all he would find was a mishmash of indecipherable gibberish, all the information packed in upside-down and sideways without any regard to operands. It was every bit as good as erasure, but it still gave law enforcement a possibility of piecing things back together had the need ever arisen. By all accounts, though, the reestablishing process could take months, even years."

The Peak was looming larger ahead. "And?" she asked.

"And that was forty years ago, my love. Nowadays, the system can sift through a dump and reestablish the operands in a matter of moments. Accessing the maps and the information on the landslide must have brought these particular dumps into my data stream, and from the looks of things," more crackling from her headset, "this core hasn't been worked since the information was dumped here forty-four years ago."

Chelisse stopped on the trail. "So what are you saying?"

"I'm saying someone seems to have wanted this valley of yours to be forgotten."

A chill iced through Chelisse's fur. "Lorenz, do some poking around. Were there any fires up here forty-four years ago, anything like that? And get my position, will you? I'm just about there, aren't I?"

Static rattled through her ears. "Another few meters, and the rockslide will be on your right. We're getting an awful lot of interference, Chelisse; have you noticed?"

"Yeah." She waved a paw around. "Maybe it's something in these rocks. Get started on that fire stuff, and let me know when you find something. EMS 7, out." Chelisse flicked on her flashlight. To her left, a brush-choked flat opened out as far as the dim red of her light could reach, while on the right side of the trail stood a face of weathered rock towering up a good fifty meters.

She moved along the cliff, watching the top ridge, jagged against the sky above, grew steadily lower until it leveled out at a height of about twenty meters, the ridge suddenly smooth and stretching along parallel to the trail, the rubble of the landslide filling the mouth of the valley, Chelisse figured. The light showed cracks and outcroppings all up and down the face, so maybe it wouldn't be that tough a climb.

She sighted on a likely looking shelf, tucked her flashlight away, and leaped, catching the rock with her claws and hauling herself up. There, she found a fissure running up to another ledge, so she wedged her paws in and inched her way onto it. Here the face bulged out a bit, but Chelisse found plenty of clawholds, picked her way over, up, and sideways, hugging the rock, till she reached the top of the bulge.

Another long crack awaited her there, so up she went, wedging and clawing and creeping, and just as she was starting to pant, not daring to look down, she glanced up to see the top of the ridge against the starry background. One more quick scramble to the side, a stretch and a grab, and she pulled herself up over the edge.

She decided to take a moment to catch her breath, but the first snout of air she sucked in had a decided taste of smoke to it. She brought her head up, saw the butte of Pascomb Peak rising into the night on her left, the valley before her, the cliff bordering it on the right, the rocks of the landslide spreading away down a gentle slope into the valley. The old trail stretched out from under the rocks and wound down around a bend, a bend Chelisse could see quite well in the orange light flickering from around it.

"Lorenz," she whispered. "Something's burning up here, all right. I'm going down to take a look."

Through the whistling background she heard, "Roger that, Chelisse," and then the static exploded, roaring like a nest of hornets through her head; Chelisse grabbed the set, and it felt warm against her pads. She tore it from her ears and dashed it to the ground just as it burst into flame, could only stand and stare as the plastic shriveled and the metal bent before the fire crackled out.

She swallowed in the sudden silence. Well, whoever it was out there, they knew she was here. With a puff of breath, she crept forward, skittered down the slope of the rock slide, and padded along the old trail, the flickering light getting brighter as she approached the bend in the canyon.

Boulders lay strewn about, Chelisse keeping to their shadows. The trail curved, the light and smoke and heat getting stronger, until at last she peered around a boulder and saw its source sitting in a little hollow there beside the trail.

A stream trickled out of the rocks, tumbled down into the canyon, and beside this stream sat a human girl, no more than seven years old, Chelisse figured. And all around her in a circle burned about twelve little fires.

Chelisse leaned forward. They all seemed to be burning the same sort of fuel, each fire licking up from a lump of something not much bigger than a basketball. The stuff gleamed somehow, as if reflecting the light of its own fire, but it didn't seem to be metal, was all wrinkled and brown like the surface of a walnut.

Then one of the things shifted, and Chelisse saw that it had four stubby legs, little black claws flexing.

The girl looked up, blinked, turned her head, and looked straight back at Chelisse. "Well, come on," she said. "We've been waiting for you." 🐾

(To be continued)



CATNIP OVERDRIVE © JASON GAFFNEY



BRETT, WHAT ARE YOU DOING?



OH DARLA, JUST MAKING SOME CHOCOLATE CHIP COOKIES.

OH, CAN I TRY ONE?



SURE. TELL ME WHAT YOU THINK.



WELL?



I THINK YOU NEED TO SEE SOMETHING.



"CRASH!"



MAYBE YOU SHOULD TRY



SOMETHING A LITTLE LESS DANGEROUS.

AUTHORS NOTE:- DO NOT TEST YOUR COOKIES IN THE ABOVE FASHION. YOU COULD PUT SOMEONES EYE OUT.



GRRR!

OKAY! SO IT WAS A BAD EXAMPLE.





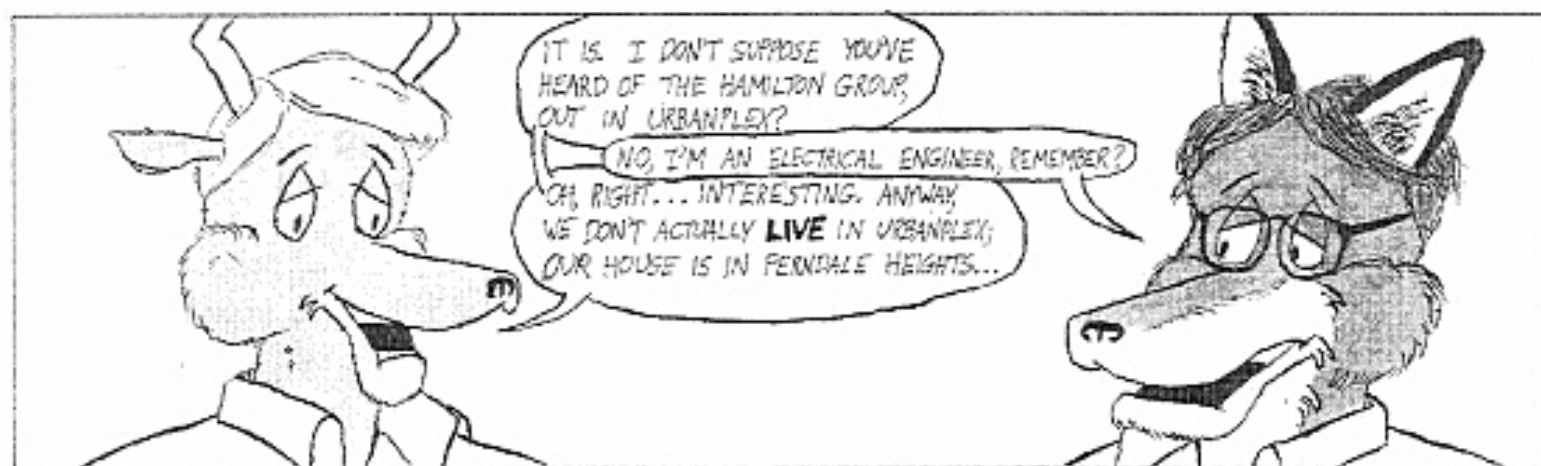
MARI and TEJ
© 94 B. HAZP

What has gone before ...

Mark McCain, a graduate student at Greenfield State University, introduced us to his office-mate, **Rajesh Varapranandhayatterjee**, his roommate, **Spike Slocum**, and his girlfriend, **Shari Greenberg**. Mark told Shari he was concerned about a marketing class he'd signed up for in the upcoming semester, since he didn't feel at all prepared for it. Shari, however, encouraged him to go through with it anyway. When we last left Mark, he was sitting in the lecture hall, apprehensively waiting for the first class to begin, only to be confronted by the yiffily annoying **Trevor W. Hamilton, III**. And now, back to our story ...

If you have comments or trivia questions about People of Fur, feel free to drop me a line. Send snail mail in care of YARF! (the address is in here somewhere) or send email to vulpo@aol.com. Happy New Year!



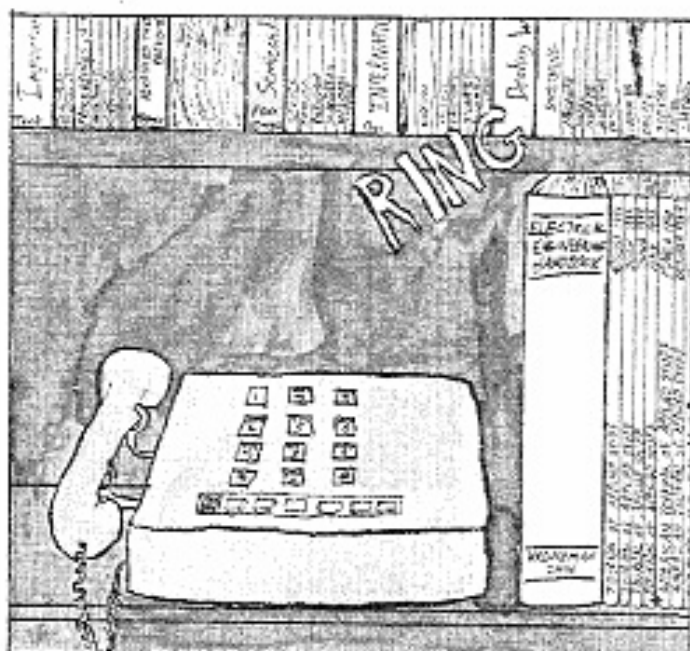


People of Fur

Story and Art ©1994 by David Peyton



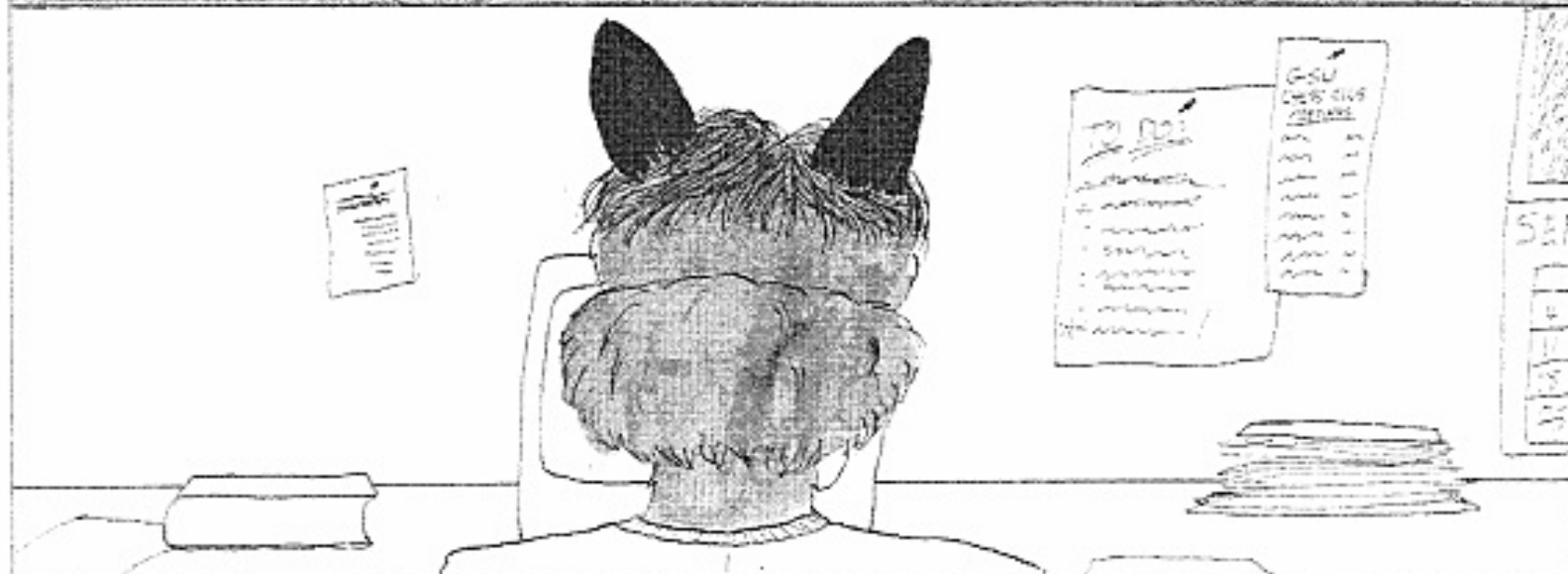








A FEW HOURS LATER...



OKAY, SO MUCH FOR THE EDITS. NOW IF I TRY TO FIT THE I-V CURVE ON A LOG-LOG SCALE...

...COME ON, COME ON, THIS THING IS SO SLOW...

MMMMMM...
CLICK! CLICK! CLICK!

...A POSSIBLE MECHANISM FOR THE POSITIVE GRADE CHANGE FORMATION...

...CONSIDERING THE NITRIDATION BEHAVIOR AS A FUNCTION OF ANNEAL TEMPERATURE...

...MARKETING CAN AFFECT THE SUPPLY AND DEMAND CURVES BY CREATING DEMAND...

PERFECT! I'D BETTER CALL MARK AND REMIND HIM ABOUT OUR DATE.

RING

RING

RING

CONTINUED...



WHO THE HELL CARES?

HI. I'D LIKE TO GET A
PATENT FOR MY WATERLESS
TOASTER.

...TOASTERS DON'T
NEED WATER.

WE'VE COME A
LONG WAY, BABY.

... FRIGGIN THING ALREADY
BEEN INVENTED... GRUMBLE - MUMBLE...

HEY, TOM!

OH, HI STEVE.

HOW'VE YOU BEEN!?

SUICIDALLY DEPRESSED.

THAT'S GREAT... LISTEN, I JUST GOT
A JOB!!

...TOM WAITS - I... I
UNDERSTAND HIM NOW...

A JOB, EH? HOW MUCH DOES IT PAY?

HA HA HA!
LOSER.

... MINIMUM WAGE.

... LOAN ME TEN BUCKS?

I'LL HAVE THE CLUB SANDWICH.

TOASTED?

**FUCK.
RIGHT.
OFF.**

SO TOM, HOW'S EVERY LITTLE THING?

MY LIFE IS AN
AFTER-SCHOOL SPECIAL.

FINALLY GRADUATED, EH?

WHAT ARE YOU DOING NOW?

I TELL PEOPLE "MUNUH MUNUH"
BUT NOBODY EVER SINGS:
"♪ DOO DOO, DEE DOO DOO ♪"



UH... YEAH.



YOU NEED TO GET BACK
IN THE ARMS OF A
GIRLFRIEND, MAN.



I'M LOOKING, BUT WHENEVER
I APPROACH A FEMALE, THE
USUAL RESPONSE IS "I'M CALLING
THE POLICE!!"



WHAT'S YOUR APPROACH?

I JUST SAY WHAT'S
ON MY MIND.



I WAS AFRAID
OF THAT.



I DON'T LIKE USING SLICK, REHEARSED LINES, LIKE "I'M RETARDED AND I HAVE \$1000 IN MY POCKET."

WORKS FOR ME!



WHY IS MY TOAST WET?

HERE, LET ME SHOW YOU HOW THE MASTER DOES IT.



HEY BABE... YOU SURE WEAR A LOT OF MAKEUP.



YEAH, TELL ME ABOUT IT.



HEY, YOU TALK!

SO I'M A LOUSY MINE. SIT DOWN, I'LL BUY YOU A DRINK.



YOU GOTTA BE KIDDING...








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Tugrik

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ART © 1992 *Greywolf* 

3/28

The Last Bits

Dispatches from the Electronic Front

You can reach us on the Internet at krisk@apple.com (Kris Kreutzman at Apple Computer, Inc.) or pdb@netcom.com (Dave Bryant's personal account).

Please remember, however, that *Yarf!* itself is *not on the net*. We cannot answer every piece of electronic mail we get and those we do cannot always be answered in a timely fashion. We also can't always spare the time to scan the net for other information not sent directly to those accounts. We apologize for any inconvenience, and strongly recommend that anyone with an urgent need to get in touch with us write to us by mail.

The information below is presented courtesy of Steven Decker, and was current as of early November 1994.

Name	Phone Number	Sysop	FidoNet
Brass Cannon	(602) 639-1039		15/29
ClawMarks	(510) 452-0350		161/314
Coyote's Kiva	(214) 686-6950	M. White	124/5014
The Dragon's Cave	(206) 752-4160	B. Lane	138/198
FVRCVS MAXIMVS	(215) 483-4047	R. Rooney	273/952
The Matrix	(804) 323-6635		264/227
Naorhy Imperial Republic	(210) 670-0501	Lord Rees	387/860
North STAR BBS	(408) 247-7827		143/219
NVARNG	(702) 887-7352		213/700
Pentarou! Enterprises	(815) 654-7956		2210/7956
Shadowfox	(510) 452-3551		161/313
StormGate Aerie	(310) 822-6729	N. Shapero	102/524
Super Deformed BBS	(404) 333-8554	G. Olhava	133/611
The Tiger's Den	(714) 530-2554		103/143
The Time Machine	(804) 599-6401	B. Dendekker	271/236
T.O.U.P. BBS	(914) 354-7499		272/1
The Trap Line	(416) 588-2964	K. Rosser	250/432
United Front BBS	(718) 886-1829		278/403
USS Scorpion NCC-4017	(904) 678-3503		366/4017
The Viking's Cove		J. Oleson	249/304
Wandering Wolf's Den	(503) 246-3684		105/96



"-MY CHOCOLATE!!"

YARF!

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