

Issue Thirty-Nine

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YARF!

THE • JOURNAL • OF • APPLIED • ANTHROPOMORPHICS

CHRISTMAS WISH



© Enrique Rosenthal 95

Foxy Ladies...

Khrysha Zorrai is a 6'1" silverblack vixen with a fearsome reputation. Though she normally works as bodyguard to a Thalendri (vulpine) baronial family, she is best known for her moonlighting as baronial executioneress. A complete loner, she uses her reputation to keep everybody at arms' length, afraid that if she ever opens up to anyone, they will die. Her past has taught her that she is "Death in a Vixen's Body".

Khrysha has appeared in the story *Kill 23*, published in *Yarf!* More are coming.

Planting Foxdrakes shows Khrysha at the job that built her reputation. At last count, she has 39 kills with noose and trapdoor, most of them her own species. The original was done for the "Tough Furry Babes" theme sketchbook of Jeremy "Kiddwolf" Kidd.

Hand-tinted photocopies, limited edition of 10, matted, \$10 US.



Tavarr & Khrysha shows Khrysha in her regular "work suit" as a high-profile bodyguard. The male with her is Tavarr, a datatech (computer nerd) in her employer's entourage. (You should see the trouble I have matchmaking these two!)

Matted photoprint, limited edition of 16 (about 12 left), \$20 US.

Sazha Vanthai-Krann is the youngest sister of Khrysha's boss, daughter of a prominent Thalendri (vulpine) baronial family who made their fortune in the local equivalent of the tobacco trade. Youngest (at 20) and shortest (at 5'2") of seven cubs, Sazha is young, sweet, and rich. She has not appeared in any stories so far.

Sazha in Vixen's Green shows "the Vanth-Krann's Cub" in

semi-formal wear for temple. Green is the traditional color of young vixens; the style of skirt is unique to Thalendri. The opposed-phenon design in the background is the badge of the Vanth-Krann family.

Matted Photoprint, \$30 US.

All prints are matted to 11x14" in faux granite mats. Include \$5 P&H per order. USA
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KREUTZMAY
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dead after the *Eight-Ball* gothit. ("Brains ... must find ... brains!") [We think that riding in a light tank crashing through a sheet-metal garage door at high speed, then being thrown across the pavement when that tank is messily and noisily blown to scrap, and watching a friend and crewmate burn to death, would do that to a person. — Ed.] Sergeant Shaddock should have aimed for the sniper's head. [People who are trained to shoot as part of their jobs are taught to shoot at center of mass. Head or limb shots are difficult even under ideal conditions, and in the field conditions are rarely ideal. — Ed.] That scene reminded me of a verse from an Iron Maiden song: "You take my life, but I'll take yours, too!"

Ralph the Wonder Hamster: A bit more confusing than usual, but still enjoyable. [...More confusing than what? — Ed.]

Robert and Katrina: I think Katrina needs to lay off playing *DOOM*.

"The Apprentice Mage": Ah, not another all-wise, all-knowing, self-righteous mage.

"Speak Low": Excellent ending, but why do I have this horrible feeling that Chelisse won't be acknowledged for what she did for the planet? The Fireballs are getting more and more interesting. Very charitable, saving the Glist who were going to wipe them out. Hope you have more stories with the Fireballs.

"Catnip Overdrive": Yeah, I like computer games, too.



"The Nitemare": Oh, that *is* scary!

More later. Tara *is* people.



Deadlines (Yes, again!)

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

#41: 29 February 1995

#43: 30 June 1996

#42: 30 April 1996

#44: 31 August 1996



Patten's Pontifications

by Fred Patten

Fortune's Wheel, by Lisanne Norman. (*The Sholan Alliance*, vol. 2) New York, DAW Books, August 1995, 646 pages, \$5.99; ISBN 0-88677-675-9.

This sequel to Norman's *Turning Point* (reviewed in *Yarf!* #29) is a big surprise in several respects. Literally; at 646 pages, it is almost 2½ times the size of the first novel's 267 pages. That story stood nicely on its own, although there was a strong hint that a sequel might be coming. *Fortune's Wheel* is clearly labeled as Book #2 in "Lisanne Norman's sensational new DAW science fiction series!", and it does *not* stand on its own. It ends on a cliffhanger, with enough unresolved plots and subplots to fill two or three more volumes, at least.

Turning Point is a nice space-opera updating of *Beauty and the Beast*. Carrie Hamilton is a young woman on Keiss, a male-dominated Terran colony planet that was conquered by brutally hostile aliens, the Valtegens, a few years earlier. A human resistance movement has grown up, but none of the men take Carrie seriously when she wants to help. Carrie nurses a wounded catlike wild animal back to health; he turns out to be Kusac, a disguised handsome felinoid from a scoutship of the Sholans, an unknown alien species that is also at war with the Valtegens. Kusac is the scout party's telepath, so he has no trouble recognizing Carrie's inner strength and her own latent telepathic powers. Carrie helps Kusac return to his shipmates, and aids him in bringing the Terrans and Sholans into an alliance to overthrow the Valtegens. The novel ends with Keiss liberated, and Carrie as Kusac's telepathically-linked lifemate who is about to return with him to Shola to meet his family.

It was obvious that any sequel would involve the culture shock that both Carrie and the Sholans must go through as she becomes the unofficial representative of humanity on a planet of intelligent cat-people. That is actually just the starting point for several unexpected developments.

Fortune's Wheel begins deceptively blandly, as little more than an imitation of McCaffrey's & Nye's *Doona* novels, with humans and extremely human-like felinoids learning to get along in a mutual alliance. The opening scenes even seem to have regressed from the exotic atmosphere of *Turning Point*, in which the Sholans were introduced as an intriguingly mysterious furry and fanged

people. *Fortune's Point's* depiction of a Sholan space battle fleet is no different from hundreds of SF human military spaceships, except that the uniformed crews are described as twitching their whiskers and ears and swishing their tails. Carrie's first impression of the Sholans is similar; they seem like little more than furry humans. It takes time for the differences to begin to develop — and they are differences that surprise not only Carrie but also the Sholans! (Unfortunately, more details cannot be given without spoiling some of the surprises.)

Carrie is only one of several important characters, both human and Sholan, in this much larger novel. She and Kusac Aldatan may be mind-bonded lovers, but they are also nervous about their unique relationship and partly resentful toward the telepathic compulsion that would force them to remain united even if they did not love each other. Kusac's family and friends react in different ways to his bringing home an alien mate. Factions within both Shola's political and religious hierarchy must decide whether the human/Sholan bonding is natural or perverted; to be encouraged for interstellar friendship or stamped out to preserve Shola's social stability. A couple of the subplots get so involved with existing Sholan politics that Carrie and Kusac are almost incidental to them.

One of the first subplots is unfortunately also one of the weakest. Norman tries to create some suspense almost immediately by making Carrie the target of murderous isolationists who fear all aliens, while most Sholans are overjoyed by the news that a friendly new space people have just been discovered who will help them fight the Valtegens. Granted that any large social group will have its lunatic fringe, this cell of terrorists snaps together unconvincingly swiftly, and its rationalizations for not believing the Sholan government's press releases describing the Terrans' aid seem exaggeratedly paranoid.

Fortune's Wheel does carry one major plot through to its conclusion, so this book ends satisfyingly even though there are numerous questions left unanswered. The cliffhanger implies that the Valtegens will return in the next novel, and there are many other sub-plots to be resolved.

Babe. Universal. Director: Chris Noonan. Written by George Miller & Chris Noonan, from the novel by Dick King-Smith. Producers: George Miller, Doug Mitchell, Bill Miller. Cinematography: Andrew Lesnie. Music: Nigel Westlake. Starring: James Cromwell, Magda Szubanski, (voices of) Christine Cavanaugh, Miriam Margolyes, Danny Mann, Hugo Weaving. Length: 91 minutes. Release date: August 4, 1995.

1995 has been a good year for live-action movies about talking animals. There is *Fluke*, which may be the first serious adult-oriented drama about talking animals rather than a comedy. And now there is *Babe*, which is a comedy (based upon a children's novel by Dick King-Smith) but a gentle, intelligent one rather than going for low farce. (There is also *Gordy*, which I haven't seen yet but which has gotten mostly unfavorable reviews.)

Babe is also an exciting demonstration of the movie industry's ability to create convincing talking animals. Until recently, this was not a serious concern. Talking animals were only for laughs, and any crude simulation of an animal spouting witticisms was considered good enough. There have been live-action comedies of animals with animated mouths since the 1940s. (Jerry Fairbanks won the Academy Award for Best Short Subject in 1942 and 1944 for his *Speaking of Animals* one-reelers.) But there was no attempt to disguise the fact that these were cartoon lips superimposed onto the faces of unintelligent animals. In movies such as the *Francis the Talking Mule* series or *The Shaggy Dog*, the emphasis was not on the animal characters as much as on the human leads. The animals were just the catalysts to keep the human high-jinks moving. It has only been since *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* in 1988 that producers and directors have had to create sympathetic non-human stars who must be as convincing to the audiences as the human cast.

Both *Babe* and *Fluke* (released just two months earlier) feature superbly directed animal casts. They imply by their body-language that they really are conversing with each other. But in *Fluke* the animals talk telepathically, so there is no need to show plausible mouth movements. In *Babe*, the pigs, dogs, sheep, horses, ducks, and other animals are seen to talk with each other. This requires animated mouths realistic enough to sustain the audience's suspension of disbelief. *Babe* combines well-directed animal poses with state-of-the-art model and Muppetry work from Jim Henson's Creature Shop, plus computerized image blending by Rhythm & Hues. The result is a cast of animal characters who can carry the whole movie, instead of only supporting the human actors. Audiences can identify with and care for them, instead of merely enjoying the movie for its clever camera tricks. (The least convincing characters are the trio of mice, who wisely are seen only in brief distance shots.)

Dick King-Smith is a British author of children's fantasies. This was published in England as *The Sheep-Pig* (Gollancz, 1983) and in the U.S. as *Babe, the Gallant Pig*

(Crown, 1985). Babe is a newborn pig won by Farmer Hogget at an English county fair. Hogget, despite his name, specializes in raising sheep, although he keeps a normal barnyard for family use. He decides that Babe will do for next Christmas' dinner. The piglet is turned over to his sheepdog, Fly, to nurse along with her litter of pups. When the pups grow old enough to be sold, Fly turns her motherly attention onto Babe, who idolizes her. Despite her assurances that nobody expects a pig to have the talents of a dog, Babe wants to herd sheep, too. He does so well at it that Farmer Hogget gets the wild idea of entering him in the annual National Sheepdog Trials.

The childrens' novel was too short for a feature-length film, so some new scenes were put in to pad the plot. Happily, they complement the story wonderfully. The best is the addition of Ferdinand, a nervous duck who tries to usurp the rooster's role of crowing to awaken the farm. He hopes to make himself so essential to the farm's routine that he will take himself off its standard menu of roast duck. Besides being a funny gag in itself, Ferdinand's acerbic personality and cynical wit adds a bit of bite which the otherwise overly sugary cast needs. It also sets up Babe's own situation. He just wants to herd sheep like his foster mother, Fly, but if he can make himself more useful to the farm than a potential dinner...

Any story is only as good as how it is directed. *Babe* is handled just right. James Cromwell as Farmer Hogget gets top marks as a crusty old farmer who convincingly comes to love the little piglet who ought to be just another item of livestock running around the barnyard. Most of the other actors are the offstage voice cast, whose performances give their animal counterparts the emotional gravity to win real audience appeal, rather than treating them as subjects for hoked-up cartoony laughs. There is much humor, but it is clever and subtle, unexpected more often than obvious. *The Sheep-Pig* may be a childrens' book, but *Babe* is a movie that is designed for audiences of all levels of sophistication. Talking animals aren't just "funny animals" any more. Kudos to everyone involved, especially Director Chris Noonan with the close association of his mentor, producer-director George (Mad Max) Miller.





HEY BRETT
CATCH!



OW!



WHY THE HELL DID YOU
DO THAT!

HEY I YELLED!

DIDNT YOU SEE
ME OUT OF THE
CORNER OF
YOUR...



EYE!

UH
YEAH...

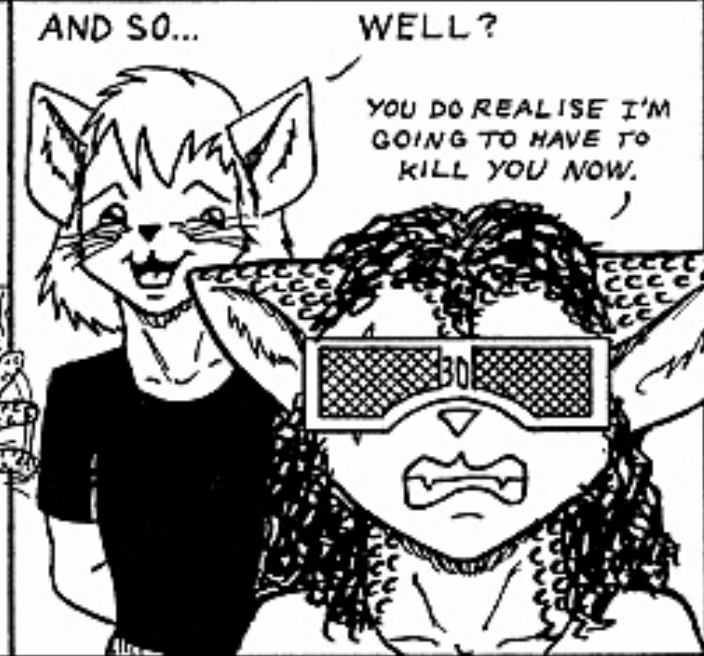
EVEN IF I DID, MY LACK OF
TELESCOPIC VISION WOULDN'T
HELP ME MUCH.



HEY! I HAVE THE
PERFECT SOLUTION.

AND WHAT MAY
THAT BE?

YOU'LL SEE.



AND SO...

WELL?

YOU DO REALISE I'M
GOING TO HAVE TO
KILL YOU NOW.

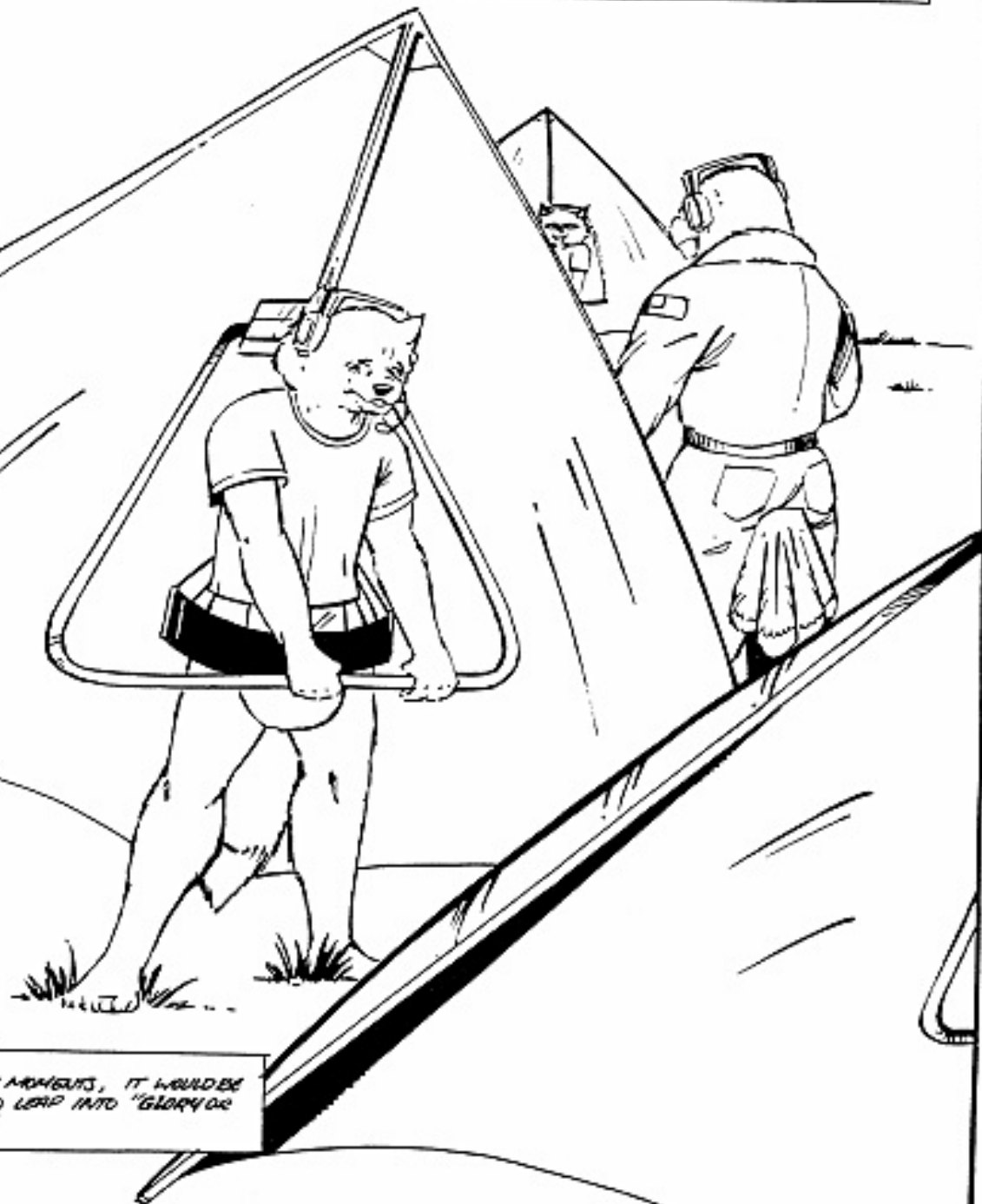


S.A.C.
7/95

TO FLY AND NOT DIE

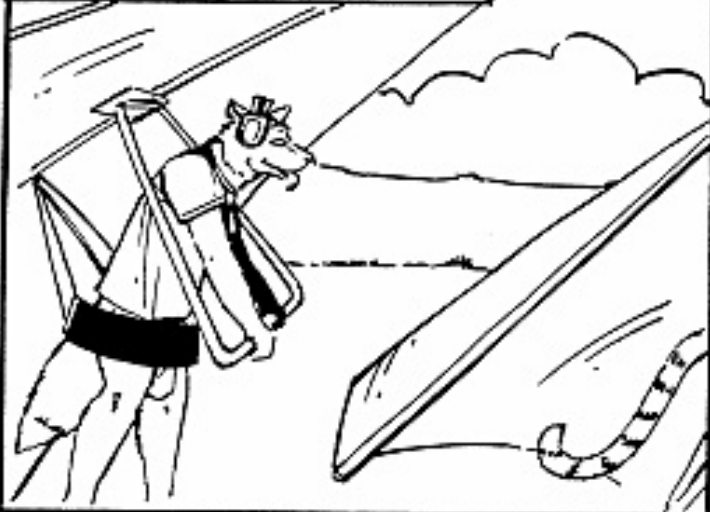
WRITER: GARY L. BELL
PENCER, INKED, LETTERS:
CHARWICK GARVEZ

WOLF STOOD BALANCING HIS NEW REGALO KITE GLIDER ABOVE HIM, GRIPPING THE CONTROL BAR TIGHTLY, GLANCING ANXIOUSLY AT THE SUPPORT CABLES AND HARNESS RIGGING.



IN A FEW MOMENTS, IT WOULD BE HIS TURN TO LEAP INTO "GLORY OR DEATH."

HAVING GUIDES FLIED THE UPDOLETS
AND AIE CURRENTS NOT FAR FROM
THE STEEP SLOPE. SOON, HE WOULD
BE AMONGST THEM.



YOU'RE NEXT.



I'M NOT READY FOR THIS! IT'S
JUST TOO HIGH!



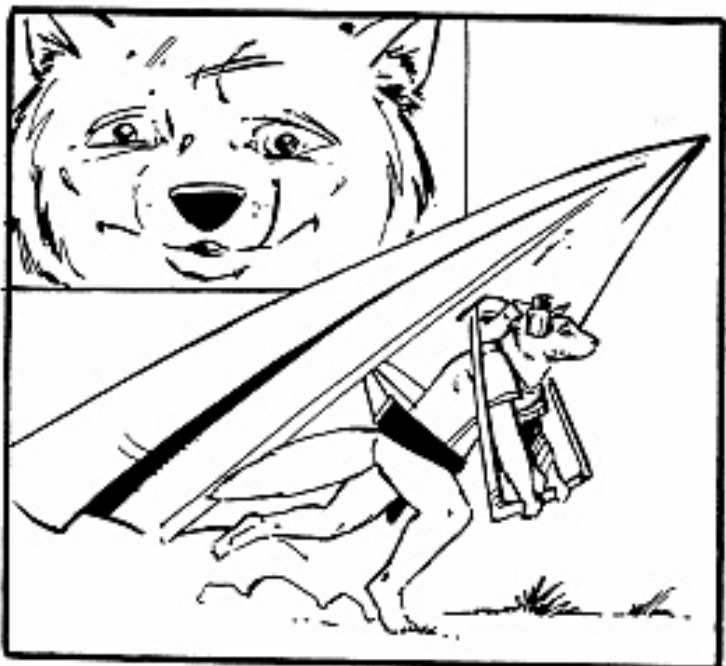
EVEN AT TORREN PINES MESA, HE HAD NEVER BEEN
MORE THAN A COUPLE OF HUNDRED FEET OFF THE
GROUND, BUT HERE...



EVER SINCE HE HAD SEEN HIS FIRST GLIDER, HE HAD
WANTED TO FLY. WHEN HE TURNED SIXTEEN, HIS FATHER
ENROLLED HIM IN GLIDER SCHOOL. THAT WAS HALF A
YEAR AGO.

NOW THE FINAL TEST LAY BEFORE HIM
JUST SECONDS AWAY.

GO!!



EVERYTHING HE HAD LEARNED WAS RUSHING BACK. HE WAS IN CONTROL, COOL AND CALM...



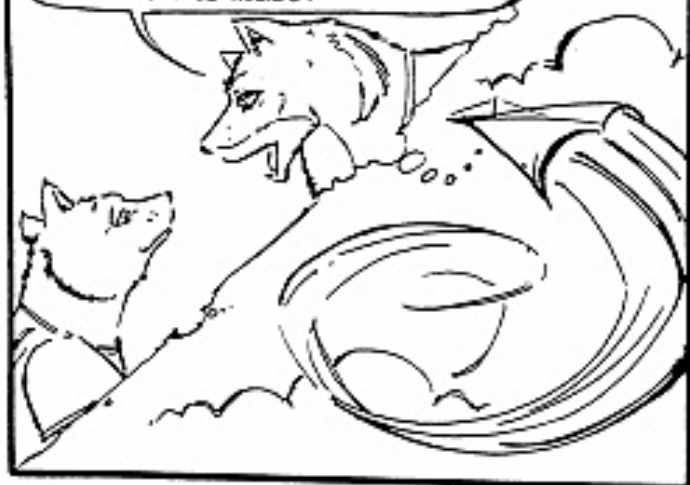
...GUIDING THE GLIDER INTO THE UPDRAFTS, RISING ON THE WIND, LISTENING TO THE HISS AS IT RUSHED PAST...

...HE SOARED LIKE AN EAGLE!



FATHER HAD BEEN RIGHT ALL ALONG ABOUT WHAT HE HAD SAID. IT ALL CAME RUSHING BACK...

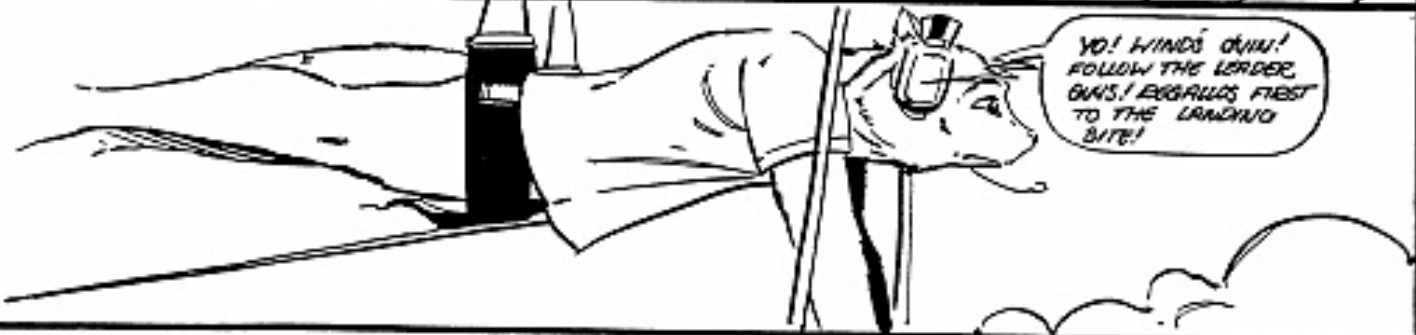
"THERE ARE MANY WAYS TO DIE, MY SON. PHYSICALLY, ONLY ONCE BUT UNLESS WE HAVE THE COURAGE TO MEET EACH NEW CHALLENGE, FIRST OF US DIES INSIDE."



FAR BELOW, HE SAW THE ROAD ACROSS THE VALLEY. SOUTH OF THAT, AGAINST THE MOUNTAINS, LAY A RIVER, A WINDING SNAKE OF SILVER. HIS GAZE FOLLOWED IT TO WHERE IT ENDED IN A BROAD EXPANSE OF SILVERY MARSH DOTTED WITH GREEN ISLANDS OF TULE REEDS AND CATTAILS.



YO! WINDS DOWN! FOLLOW THE LEADER, GUYS! BRIGADES FIRST TO THE LANDING SITE!



SUPPORT PEOPLE RAN INTO THE LANDING AREA, HELPING TO CLEAR GLIDER FROM THE LANDING ZONE BEFORE THE NEXT ONE CAME DOWN.

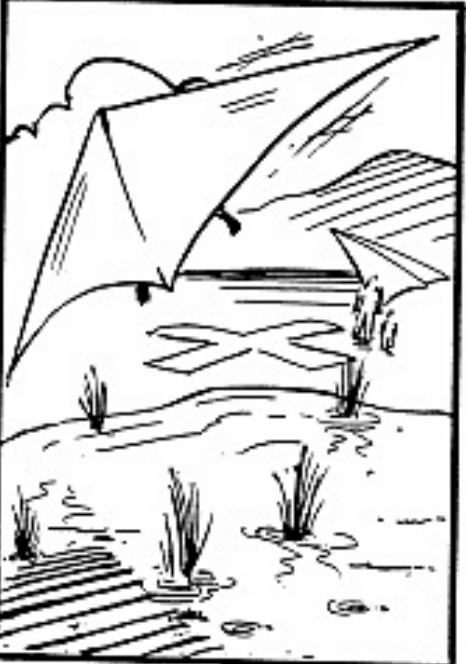


WOLF! IT'S ALL YOURS! BE CAREFUL!

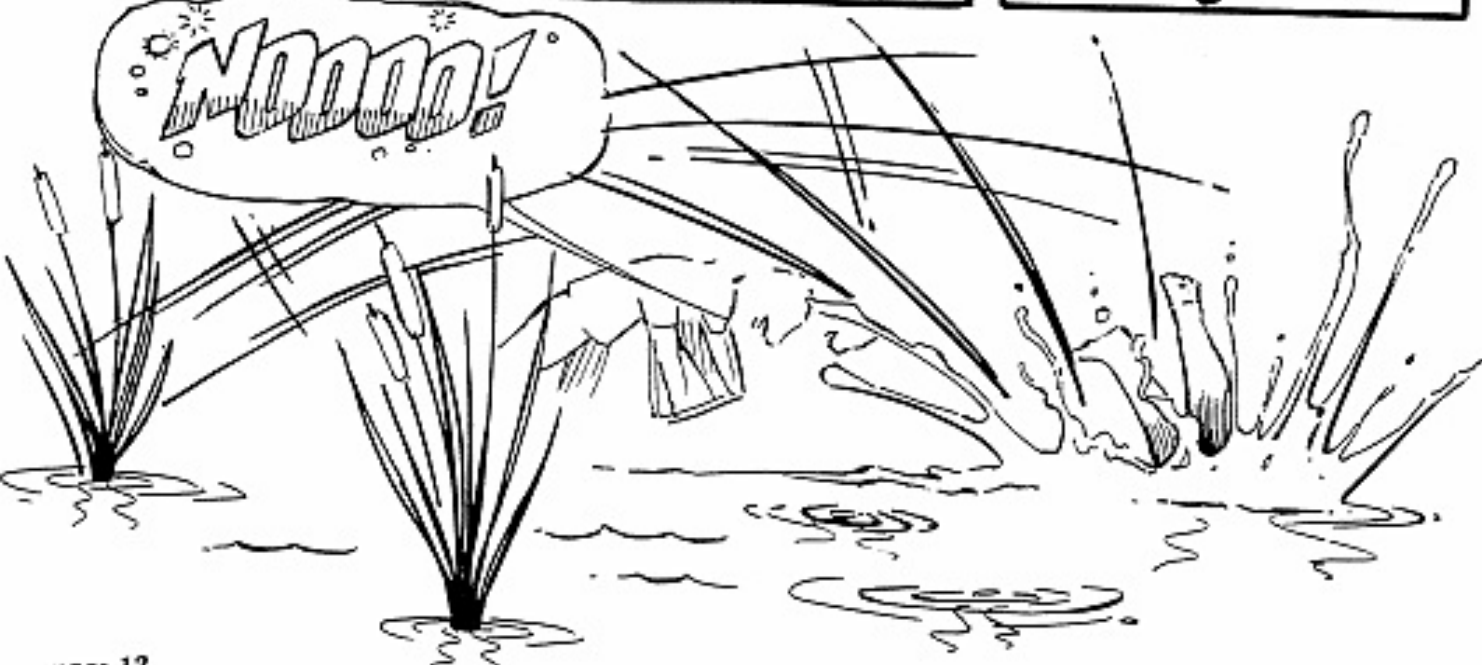
WE GOT SOME ERGATIC WIND GUSTS DOWN HERE. KEEP IT STEADY!

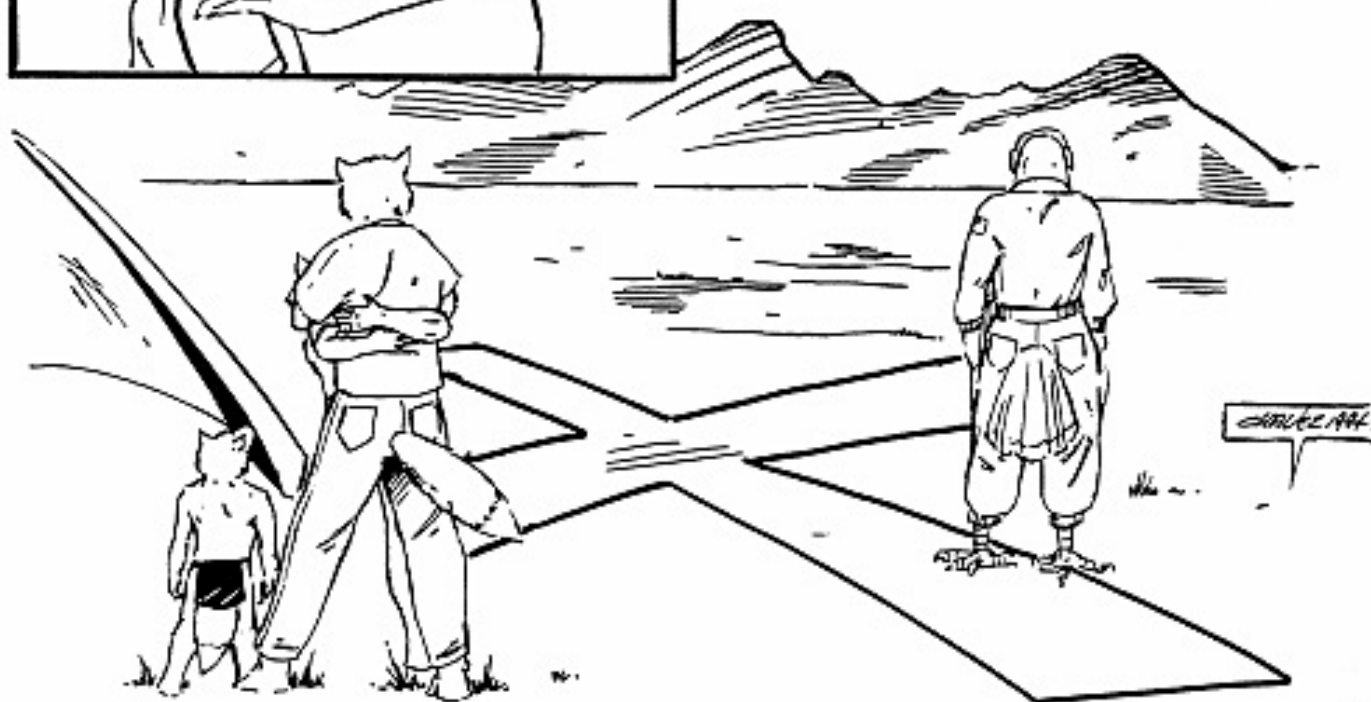
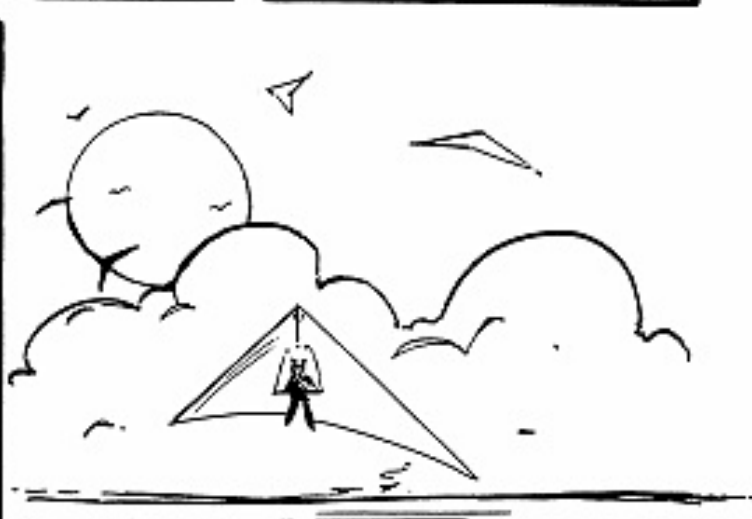
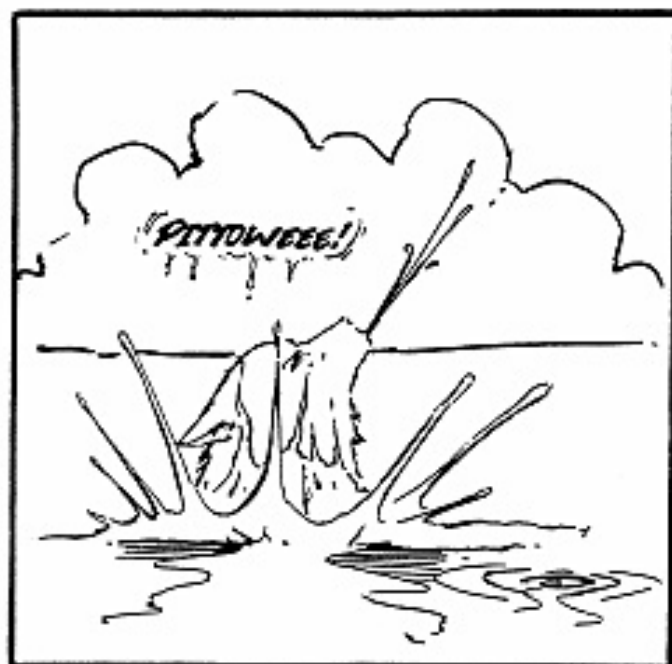


WOLF TIGHTENED HIS GRIP ON THE CONTROL BAR, SHIFTING HIS WEIGHT EXPERTLY AS HE APPROACHED THE LANDING SITE.



Nooooo!







Her Majesty

By Michael Payne

Even sprawled over the olive-drab upholstery of a hospital chair in what had to be an uncomfortable position, his head lolled sideways, his fur dull and matted in the gray morning light, Lorenz looked so wonderful, Chelisse wished she could get herself out of bed and curl up with him.

Yeah, right. As if she could find the strength somewhere to push the blanket off, let alone stand upright.

A snort interrupted the steady in-and-out of his breathing, and he sat up with a start. He rubbed his eyes, gave a big feline yawn, smiled, and leaned forward to touch his lips to her forehead. "There, see? I told you I'd be here when you woke up."

"But ... wait..." She stopped, the hollowness of her voice making her ears twitch, cleared her throat, started again. "I thought they kicked you out, said you weren't my husband, said you had to leave...." She managed to pull her paw along the sheet to touch his. "Did I dream all that?"

"No, love." His fur caressed her pads. "Only 'next of kin' have visiting rights, and since no government in this part of settled space recognizes anthrop marriages, I don't qualify." He shrugged. "But after I explained to Fin that he'd be needing a new operations chief if he didn't assign me to your security detail, he was very understanding."

"Yeah, I'll bet he was." For a moment — the sheets warm, Lorenz beside her, the morning soft at the window — Chelisse could almost forget the tubes jabbed into various parts of her, could almost forget the slippery, itchy feeling all over her body where her fur had fallen out in clumps, could almost forget the dull pain in her every joint and the strange heaviness of her limbs and the nanodocs scouring her system. "I'm sorry I missed that particular discussion."

A tap at the door, and Orley peered in, a grin across his muzzle. "I'm sorry, but this is a hospital zone. I'll have to ask you to keep it down in here."

Lorenz rolled his eyes, and Chelisse forced a quick raspberry through her teeth. This brought Orley the rest of the way into the room, his arms crossed. "Well, well, well. Such ingratitude — it's almost feline."

"Yes, yes." Lorenz waved a paw. "Now be a good puppy and get me some coffee, won't you?"

"Don't do it, Orley." Chelisse was nicely surprised when she got the sentence out without her voice cracking. "If I don't get coffee, no one does."

Lorenz laughed, pushing himself to his paws and stretching. "She Who Must Be Obeyed, is it?"

Orley bowed. "We are Her Majesty's humble servants."

Chelisse blew another raspberry. "You start that 'Her Majesty' crap again, Orley, I'll have you clapped in irons."

"Oh, no." Lorenz shook a claw at her. "I'll no have him locked up in here with us." He gave Orley a piteous look. "Please, sir, what news of the great outside world?"

"Hey, yeah." Chelisse wiggled into something closer to a sitting position. "Is the Tersh An any better?"

Orley nodded. "The Glist doctor's hopeful, but it's too early to tell. This is the first time in maybe two hundred years a Glist has shed his skin, so —"

Lorenz gave a loud sigh. "How many times do I have to explain it to you people? The proper pronoun when referring to the Glist is 'emsht.' It's not as if —"

Chelisse's raspberry stopped him, and his ears-down look of surprise made her laugh. "Hey, three raspberries in a row! I must be getting better."

"Yes." Lorenz's eyes narrowed. "At least we know your intellectual facilities are returning to their former levels."

She settled deeper into her pillows. "You're just jealous 'cause I always win our little arguments." She nodded to Orley. "But the Tersh An's gonna be all right?"

The big lupine shrugged. "The Glist doctor says it's still touch and go, but," and he bowed slightly to Lorenz, "emsht says the rehydration is coming along nicely. No one's exactly sure what happened to you two, traveling through tunnelspace with the Fireballs and everything."

Chelisse dragged a paw to her chest, rubbed at the bare patches in her fur. "Tell me about it. I'm gonna end up as bald as Fin."

A knock came from the door, and Orley pulled it open just enough to peer out. "Well, speak of the devil." He threw the door wide to reveal Fin himself in the hall, arms crossed and moustache wriggling. "We were just talking about you, Fin."

The human's eyebrows bristled. "Perhaps you didn't realize it, Orley, but when I posted you here on guard duty, I meant you were to stand outside the door and watch for anyone trying to get in."

Orley blinked, and the look of bewilderment that crept over his face almost brought tears to Chelisse's eyes. No one did phony innocence better than Orley. "Gee, Mr. Finlayson, I thought I was here to make sure these two didn't leave."

Fin's face scrunched up on one side, the other eye glaring out from beneath its brow like a pickled onion. "That's enough of that, thank you." His face returned to normal — at least, as close to normal as Fin's face ever got — and he crooked a thumb over his shoulder. "Now, back to your post. The mayor herself is coming by to visit our heroic weasel, so if it's not too much to ask, perhaps we could look a bit more like professionals when she arrives."

Orley spread his paws and turned to Chelisse. "I'll be right outside if you need anything." He padded out to tower above Fin. "Should you need to have anyone thrown through a window, for instance." He grinned into Fin's glower. "That's a purely hypothetical instance, of course."

"It'd better be." Fin marched into the room, Chelisse trying not to laugh at the faces Orley was making behind him, and pushed the door shut. "Lupines." Fin shook his head. "If he wasn't so good, I'd've fired him years ago."

Chelisse pushed her lower lip into a pout. "Gee, boss, you used to say that about me...."

Lorenz was at her side instantly, patting her paw. "Oh, now, don't fret, love. He still says it about you when you're not around."

"Really?" She gave a sniff and looked at Fin, glowering back from the doorway.

"I should say not." He puffed through the brush of his moustache and strode to the other side of her bed. "Even if I wanted to, I couldn't fire you now. You just saved the whole planet, remember?"

"Damn right I remember." She moved a paw to touch his hand. "But I love hearing you say it, that's all."

A smile pulled at his cheek, such a strange sight Chelisse had to look twice to make sure, but by then, his usual scowl was back. "Just don't let it go to your head. The media's been full of nothing but you all week, and I can guarantee this little publicity stunt of the mayor's won't cool things down any."

"Publicity..." Chelisse blew out a breath. "So what'm I

s'posed to do? Sit up and lick her hand? Let her get a few poses in before they decide it's too much effort to keep me alive? Or will she want my pelt for the museum downtown?"

Fin rubbed his big, bare forehead. "Ah, good. One more thing for me to worry about." His eyes went to Lorenz. "I agreed to assign you here, Lorenz, for several reasons —"

"What?" Chelisse couldn't quite summon the strength for a raspberry. "I thought it was 'cause he threatened to quit."

The human's glare fell on her again. "And that's one of my reasons right there. You're our Primary Voice, Lorenz, so I'm expecting you to help me spin this when Chelisse starts mouthing off at the mayor."

"Hey!" Chelisse wanted to shake a claw at him, but it was just too much effort. "You've seen me handle press conferences before! I don't mouth off at —"

"Yes, love." Lorenz took her paw again. "You do."

"What?" She stared up at him.

A smile spread through his whiskers. "It's part of your charm." He pressed her paw to his lips, then nodded to Fin. "Of course I'll do my job, Fin, but I'm here more as the beloved husband than I am as your P. V."

Chelisse let her mouth go sideways. "I'm not so sure you qualify as 'beloved husband' at this point...."

Lorenz just patted her paw again, and Fin gave a crisp nod. "Good enough. All three nets are sending cameras, but I've got them to agree not to bother you with questions. It should be just the mayor coming in, congratulating you, posing for a bit, and then they'll all be gone." His mouth squirmed sideways under his moustache. "I would take it as a personal favor, Chelisse, if you'd just let things go smoothly."

He looked so earnest, Chelisse had to laugh, her annoyance dissolving. "Jesus, Fin, I did just put my life on the line to save the whole damn planet. I think I can manage to be civil to the mayor for five minutes." She tried her best to look heroic. "Are we professionals, or are we not?"

That got a laugh out of Lorenz, and the warmth in his wonderful dark eyes made Chelisse feel better than she had in days. A soft rapping at the door, and Orley poked his nose in. "Mr. Finlayson? Mayor Torres is here."

Fin pulled at his vest and cleared his throat. "Ah, certainly, Orley. Show her Honor in."

The lupine nodded, pushed the door open, and in came Mayor Torres, the same sour look on her face that she always seemed to have whenever Chelisse saw her. Three humans wearing camera mounts jammed themselves into the doorway behind her, their soft murmurs pricking at Chelisse's ears: "...an example of anthrop obedience in these troubled times..." overlapping with "...who last

week risked her life in the defense of..." and "...Her Honor taking time from her busy..."

The mayor strode over to Fin, and her sudden smile made her look a lot more like her campaign ads. "Mr. Finlayson." She stuck out a hand. "A job well done."

Fin beamed. "That it was, Your Honor." He took the mayor's hand and gently turned her so she was facing Chelisse. "Chelisse is one of our best agents."

A little of her earlier sourness pulled at the mayor's smile. "Yes. Of course." She set her hand on the bed near Chelisse's shoulder and leaned forward, Chelisse able to see the tiny words scrolling across her glasses. "Marches owes you and EMS a tremendous debt of gratitude, Agent Chelisse. I don't see how anyone can continue to doubt the value you anthropos bring to our community, and I hope that those agitating on both sides of the anthrop question will come to see the importance of reasonable dialogue. You have shown us that working together is our only alternative, and on behalf of the Coxehill City Council, I commend you, Agent Chelisse."

The mayor's smile seemed so genuine, it took Chelisse by surprise. "Well, uh, thank you, your Honor. So many folks pitched in, well, like you said, working together, right?" She saw Lorenz smile out of the corner of her eye. "So I'm really saying thank you for Mr. Finlayson and all of EMS, for Ronnie McTeague and the Fireballs and the scientists out at the research station, for Anson Tuttle and Tersh An Felanshwer of the Glist Waterworks School, and, of course, for my husband Lorenz." She looked over at him. "That's everyone, I think."

Mayor Torres's brow wrinkled. "Your ... husband?" She stayed that way for a moment, then her face cleared. "Oh, yes, of course. I'll sign you a breeding permit as soon as you feel well enough."

Chelisse felt her own brow wrinkle. "Excuse me?"

"Don't think another thing about it." The mayor patted Chelisse's shoulder. "We'll be honored to let you pass your genes to another generation. You've certainly earned —"

"Whoa, whoa, whoa!" Chelisse raised a shaky paw. "I don't know how much biology you know, mayor, but —"

Fin practically leaped forward, his teeth clenched in a strained smile. "Well, your Honor, I'm sure you have other —"

Chelisse ignored him, managed to gesture toward Lorenz. "This is my husband, Mayor Torres. A breeding permit wouldn't do us much good, I'm afraid, but thanks for the offer."

The mayor followed her gesture, and Chelisse couldn't help smiling when Lorenz held out a paw and said, "We've met before, your Honor. P. V. Lorenz, EMS operations chief."

A second's silence — even the camera crews had stopped murmuring — then the mayor turned to Fin. "I ... I don't understand. Mr. Finlayson, how can these throps ... be ... be..."

"Married, your Honor?" Chelisse smiled. "It was a small ceremony at St. Francis Catholic Church. Father Cooper, the pastor there, has the paperwork if you're interested, all duly signed and witnessed. Mr. Finlayson even stood in as father of the bride."

Fin was shifting from foot to foot under the mayor's sharpening gaze. "Aye, well, y'see, your Honor —"

"Mr. Finlayson..." She spoke quietly, but the sourness filled her face. "The Union Laws strictly forbid any —"

"If I might, your Honor," Lorenz interrupted, his tones calm and measured. "The Union Laws are meant to control anthrop population, so they pertain only to same-species unions. Cross-species unions, as unorthodox as they may sound, are now being allowed as complimentary control measures by several governments across settled space."

"What?" The mayor shifted her frown to Lorenz. "What do you mean? What governments?"

Lorenz bowed, and Chelisse saw he had slipped into his professional mode — deferential competence, he called it, the perfect assistant living only to share information with his superiors. "Mars for one, your Honor, and Earth for another. Granted, those planets have much smaller anthrop communities than we have here on Marches, but the arguments for allowing cross-species unions are still compelling."

The mayor blinked, her frown easing slightly. "Earth? Really? I ... I hadn't heard anything about this."

He nodded. "The UN Council was quite impressed with the effect such measures have had on the anthrop populations of Palisade, Holmestead, and Delib. Those anthropos who choose permanent cross-species unions, after all, are voluntarily removing themselves from the breeding equations. I can give you the uplink addresses to access, if you like." Lorenz shrugged, his professional demeanor fading. "And while I certainly can't speak for every anthrop on Marches when it comes to reproductive issues, my own experience has been that love can give good sense quite a run for its money."

A smile pulled at the mayor's face. "Excuse me?"

"Yeah," Chelisse added. "Love and good sense don't mix."

Lorenz looked down at her, his dark eyes shining. "My point exactly. Good sense says I should find myself a nice little feline, settle down, and start making kittens." He took Chelisse's paw and knelt down beside the bed. "But I've known since I first realized I was falling in love with you. Sense has nothing whatsoever to do with it. I

can do without offspring, but to wake in the morning and not see you beside me..." He shook his head. "That's too much to contemplate."

Chelisse could only stare for a moment, her throat tight, her arms aching for him, but it took all her strength just to drag her left paw across her body to touch his chin. His paws slipped around her, though, raised her gently, and she pressed her face into the soft fur of his shoulder, his paws warm at her back, his purring making her whole body tremble.

How long they held each other, Chelisse didn't know, but Fin clearing his throat brought her back. "Ah. Right," she muttered into Lorenz's ear. "We've got guests, haven't we?"

"Have we?" came his whispered reply.

"I'm afraid so."

She felt him sigh. "Back to business, then."

Cold tickled the bare skin along her chest as he lowered her to the bed, and she looked over to see both the mayor and Fin smiling, the camera operators standing silently behind, their glass eyes focused on her. Great. Her whole life was gonna be on the evening news. "Excuse us, your Honor," she said into the silence. "It's been sort of a trying week."

"I understand." The mayor looked more relaxed than she had since she'd come in. "Just one more thing, then I'll be on my way. The sector governor has informed me that the new Glist Collective has —"

"What?" Lorenz started up from where he'd been kneeling. "Excuse me, your Honor, but we'd heard that the Collective had shattered when the Schools of Glist thought failed to agree on a policy for dealing with the other spacefaring races. Are you saying the situation's changed?"

The mayor nodded. "According to the governor's office, and in the new Collective's 'Declaration of First Principles', well ..." A gleam came into her eyes. "We must've really impressed them, the way we handled that invasion, because they want to set up an embassy here on Marches, right here in Coxehill, the first Glist embassy to the UPC ever, right here!"

Chelisse heard Lorenz catch his breath. "Of course," he murmured, but the mayor was already going on.

"The part that has everyone a little confused, the reason the governor called me this morning and the reason I arranged to meet you, is this." She reached into her pocket, pulled out a reader, and poked at its keys. "In their Declaration, the Glist ask for their Waterworks School to act as liaison to what they call 'the EMS Western Division School'." She looked up. "That mean anything to you?"

Chelisse stared, shook her head, and saw Lorenz shrug,

though the way his whiskers danced told her he knew more than he was letting on.

The mayor poked some more at the reader. "There's a lot that's odd in here. I mean, the Glist don't seem to have a word for anthrop. They keep referring to you as if you were human!" She sighed, flicked the reader off, and held it out to Fin. "This is your copy, Mr. Finlayson. I'd recommend you look it over before the Glist delegation arrives."

Fin looked from the mayor to the reader and back again. "Uhh, excuse me, your Honor? The ... the delegation?"

Mayor Torres nodded. "The governor said he would trust my judgment as to whether an Emergency Maintenance team could be trusted with the duties the Glist have assigned you." She turned back to Chelisse. "I'll admit I had my doubts. I mean, first official diplomatic contact, and we're supposed to let anthros handle it?" She rubbed her chin. "But I like what I see here. Mr. Finlayson has obviously trained you well, and I think you'll be just the ones for this job."

Chelisse tried her best to look somber, but the clear distress on Fin's face kept threatening to make her bust out laughing. He was still looking pretty comical when the mayor rounded on him and stuck out her hand. "I know you'll make Marches proud." She stepped toward the door, the cameras moving into the hall ahead of her, then she stopped and looked back at Lorenz. "And I'd like to see that information you mentioned on cross-species marriages, if you don't mind. Send the location addresses to my secretary."

"Certainly, your Honor." Lorenz bowed.

Mayor Torres nodded once more, gave a last smile, and strode out of sight down the hallway. The silence in the room went on for a few more seconds, then Fin gave a moan. "Ach, this is just what we need! I don't even know any diplomats. How're we supposed to —"

Lorenz had moved around the bed, was taking the reader from Fin's hand. "Oh, relax, Fin." He tapped his claws over the keys. "Unless I miss my guess, this really has nothing to do with us at all."

"What?" Fin stared. "Nothing to do with us? Lorenz, they mentioned us by name! How can you say —"

"Here." Lorenz gave the reader one last tap, then turned it around and held it up to Fin. "All the Glist really want to do is meet and study with the Fireballs."

Fin was busy gaping at the reader, so Chelisse cleared her throat. "Could you maybe run that by one more time, love?"

"Of course." Lorenz pressed his paws together. "Consider, if you will, the Glist Collective."

Chelisse groaned. "Oh, God. A science lecture."

His ears dipped and rose, but he otherwise ignored her. "Like-minded individuals get together to form Schools, and if enough Schools can agree on enough subjects, the Schools draft a Declaration of First Principles and form a University."

"Yes." Chelisse sighed. "I'm sure they do."

Lorenz cleared his throat. "This creates a problem, however, when the Glist look at our United Planetary Congress. Emsht don't see a huge federal bureaucracy with a hundred little agencies; emsht see a hundred little agencies that have all chosen to join up into a huge federal bureaucracy."

That made Chelisse laugh. "Wait. They think our UPC works like their University — I mean, emsht's University?"

"Exactly. After all, the Glist have very little experience with alien cultures."

Fin had finally looked up from the reader. "Can we get to some sort of a point here, Lorenz?"

"Very well, Fin. Y'see, one of the University's main functions is to assign to each School the planets it can use for its experiments. A planet, once assigned, becomes the sole property of the School it's given to, and should another School wish to study something on that planet, the University draws up a treaty, a treaty that looks very much like that." He gestured to the reader Fin was holding.

"Wait a minute." Chelisse felt a prickling at her neck. "Didn't the mayor say they referred to EMS as a School?"

Lorenz nodded. "We're an agency of the UPC, so the Glist see us as a School. And since we're the highest UPC agency out here, to Glist thinking," he spread his paws, "our little branch of EMS must own Marches."

Fin's eyes opened till they seemed ready to pop from his skull. "Then ... then this isn't a treaty with the UPC at all? It's...it's with us? EMS Western Division Marches?"

"I would guess." Lorenz waved a paw. "I'll have to look it over more thoroughly before I'm sure — Glist documents tend to read like some horribly abstruse physics text. But it makes sense: Of all the planets in the UPC, only we here on Marches have something that several Schools of Glist thought have already shown an interest in." He cocked his head at Chelisse. "And what would that be, class?"

She sighed. "The Fireballs, right, professor?"

"Correct again." He blew her a kiss.

"But ... but ... but ..." Fin looked like he'd been punched in the stomach. "We're a minor branch of a minor government agency! We can't make treaties with entire alien peoples!" He stared wide-eyed at the reader as if it were a snake wriggling in his hands. "We'll have to tell

them, tell the mayor, get her to take us off this before—"

"What?" Chelisse wanted to leap up and grab him by the lapels, but her body would only let her sit forward a little. "Take us off? Fin, we're the only ones who can do this!"

He raised his eyes. "Do what? Go to prison?"

"God damn it, Fin! We —" Spots started popping at the corners of Chelisse's vision; she made herself settle into her pillows, take a few breaths, keep her voice calm. "Fin, the Glist wanna study the Fireballs, right? Well, nobody knows more about those little guys than us. We discovered them, for Christ's sake, and we've had Terelda and her team up there at the research station since it opened!"

Fin glared. "That's not the point, Chelisse."

"But it is!" More spots, but Chelisse forced them away. "The Glist think they're coming here on a science mission, but, well, you heard the mayor! She thinks we've pulled off some major diplomatic coup or something! We'll hafta be there between the UPC and the Glist just to run crowd control when the —" Her voice gave out as the spots flooded over her, and for a moment, she couldn't see, couldn't hear, didn't know where up was, the numbness in her limbs suddenly turning cold.

She felt the pillows against her back first, then paws on her shoulders, Lorenz's sweet scent very strong. She opened her eyes to see his face peering at her, his ears down. "Fin, call the nurse," he was saying.


"No," she got out, raising a paw to touch his face. "I'm fine, love, just pushing myself a little much. But I just ... I ... I know we can do this."

Lorenz took her paw. "I know." He stood and looked at Fin. "Whatever the legalities of the situation, Fin, I just don't see how we have much of a choice."

Fin squinted. "Come again?"

Lorenz waved a paw. "Chelisse's right. The emsht of the Waterworks School are expecting to work with us, and if the UPC accepts the treaty and then doesn't produce us, that's a major breach of etiquette. Do we want to insult the Glist on our first joint venture? Once we've gotten a working relationship going with the emsht of the Waterworks School, we can maybe try to explain how the UPC functions, but until then..."

Silence filled the room for a moment, then Fin gave a sigh that seemed to come all the way up from his toes. "Aye, I suppose you're right." His face screwed itself into a glare, and he pointed a finger at Chelisse. "But we're not doing a thing till you get back on your paws, weasel! If we're all going down, then you're coming with us!"

Chelisse couldn't stop a laugh from bubbling out. "Hey, I wouldn't have it any other way." 

And now a final word from the author, giving credit where it's due:

To the folks at *Yarf!* who let me start all this way back when without any idea of where it was going to go.

To Ken and Lisa, Tom and Tara, Jeff and Chris, and Dan and Janet who, all unknowing, were the basic models for Lorenz and Chelisse.

To the various songwriters who, also all unknowing, gave me the titles for these stories.... The author of the spiritual "Down by the Riverside", Francis Scott Key for the "Star Spangled Banner" ("...the rockets' red glare, the bombs bursting in air..."), Irving Berlin for "Puttin' on the Ritz", the author of the medieval Latin hymn "Panis Angelicus" ("Panis angelicus fit panis hominum..."), which roughly translates as "The bread of angels be-

comes bread for people..."), Harold Arlen for "That Old Black Magic" (... "I hear your name and I'm aflame, aflame with such a burning desire..."), Ogden Nash for "Speak Low", and Paul McCartney for "Her Majesty."

And finally, to the late James Finlayson, character actor extraordinaire, one of the original Keystone Kops but probably best know for his appearances in more than thirty Laurel and Hardy films — he's the guy they're trying to sell a Christmas tree to in *Big Business*, the butler in *Night Owls*, the villainous saloon owner in *Way Out West*. A finer glower has never been recorded on film. Long may he wave.

Persevere, all.





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TRIP-TRAP
TRIP-TRAP
TRIP-TRAP
TRIP-TRAP

MICROFILM
HARD LAMINATED
FORD



OK!
OK!

HUH... I WUNNER
IF THIS IS
THE PLACE?

CREEKK

CLOP CLIP
CLOP CLOP CLIP

BZZ
BZZ

WATCHER
STEP

BZZ
BZZ



CLOP CLIP

CLOP TINK TANK

HUH-

TINK
TANK
TINK

SPLASH
SPLASH

SPLASH
BLIPSH
BLOOSH

HMMM - BETTER CHECK
THE LOCATION....



WHOOOPSS

CLICK

Put out dat
light, Mate!
Don'tcha know
there's a
War on?!

THE KEYAPED HIDE-AWAY

- NO LIVE FOOD
- KEEP YOUR PSI TO YOURSELF
- NO UNACCOMPANIED HUMANS
- NO GROKING
- FEED TROUGH AVAILABLE

WELCOME PONG ENTHUSIASTS!

WELCOME!

MONTY! Table For One!

Righto - This way Sur-

HOPE THIS IS AS GOOD AS THEY SAY IT IS...

WELCOME TO CONVENTIONEERS

RALPH the Wonder Hamster in

FLOATING DEBRIS

PART 6A

EXCESSIVE VERBAGE
JIM ALVES
EXCESSIVE LINEAGE...
ROY D. POWERS II

JUMPIN' CATS!
LOOKA DIS PLACE!

SIBILLA DEL MUMAFLET
GUSTO THRAY

Let me Adjust your Table, Sur...

Would you care for a Drink before Dinner?

LET ME SEE THE LIST...

FLA-SWIZ!

We also have "soft" drinks and other Fluids, SUR

DRINK LIST

- TRIAL BY FIRE • CAT ELIXIR
- KOOSBAINIAN MUD PACK • YO-YO
- LUPINE SHAGGER • CRAZY-8'S
- BLACK DEATH ZOMBIE • GIN FLIZ
- OLD POLECAT BITTERS • YUCKO
- T.K.O. • TUMMY RUMBLERS
- THE WARM FUZZY • MIXES MESS
- LEFTURN WHOOPIE • STAGGERS
- KOOSBAINIAN WALL BANGER • 3
- Q-TEE-WACK • KERASH-BANG-BOM
- BELLY BRUISER • TECHNICOLORE
- KARCADEH • TAMER HENDY MIX
- MAHALABIAN JUICER • OHS
- LOOSE LIVER TONIC • NIP

HMMM

HEY!
'HOW'S 'BOUT THAT
'KOOSBAINIAN WALL
BANGER' THERE--?

SUR?!

YEAH, THAT SOUNDS GOOD!
AND A PLATE OF 'NOSHES!

Very Well
.... Sur....

dear
oh
Dearie
me...

SUDDENLY, THE ROOM GREW SILENT...

I'M NOT GONNA TAKE IT- NO!

WELL, I'M NOT GONNA TAKE (t)!

HERE, YOU TAKE IT--!!

HE ORDERED WHAT?!

AHHH-THANK YOU!

GRR-YIP-YAP.
YAP-YIKE

DID YA HEAR THAT?

GOR
BLIMEY

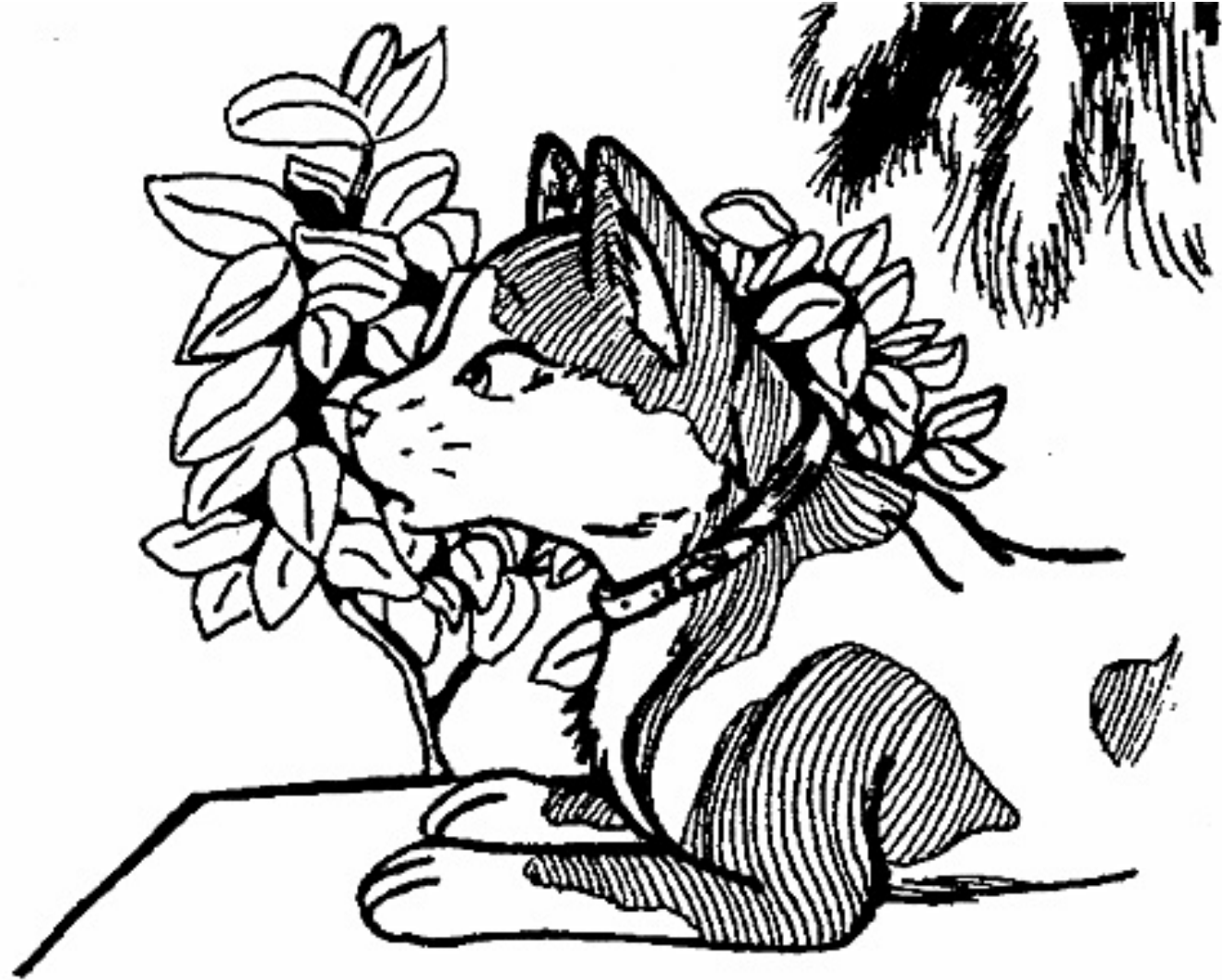
Oh Jeez...

* TRANSLATION:
HERE YA GO -
IT'S YOUR FUNERAL.









The House Cat

A Fox Fable

By John Cawley • Illustrated by "Cafaroo"

A cat lay sleepily on the front porch of the house she lived in. The sun warmed her fur and she began to purr softly to herself. Her eyes scanned the horizon for something of interest. She never knew what she might see. Perhaps it would be a friend coming to visit. The cat loved company. Perhaps her owner would arrive with a new toy. She had many toys, but always loved a new one.

On this day, though, she saw something quite unfamiliar. A flash of red fur darted between some trees in the distance. "A new dog has moved into the neighborhood," she thought. Dogs were sometimes nice company ... unless they only wanted to chase her. The fur on her neck bristled up at the thought. A streak of red put the stranger in a bush near the fence around her house.

"Are you new around here?" the cat mewed to the bush. There was no answer. She became a bit nervous. A silent dog was often a chaser. Her eyes widened when she saw a pair of eyes peer out of the bush. The eyes did not look like dog eyes. They were slits of vision, much like hers. Her purring grew louder as she considered the fun of a new cat in the neighborhood.

"My name is 'cat'," she said as she began to rise from the porch. "What are you called?"

Curious about this feline, the cat began to walk down the steps of the porch to the yard. She stopped short when what appeared to be a dog's head popped out of the bush.

"I am 'fox', son of 'fox'," said the stranger. "Do you challenge or retreat?"



The cat giggled. "I don't recognize that game," she purred as she came closer. She'd never seen a fox before, but had heard one of her dog friends talk about them. It didn't seem to be much bigger than she was.

"Game? There is no game here." The fox walked slowly out of the bush and eyed the cat suspiciously. "I am searching for food. This is the first time I've been to this end of my land."

Cautiously, the cat approached the fence where the fox stood. She slowed on occasion when she saw him tense and possibly prepare to flee. Her voice softly spoke to him, purring frequently to calm him. As she got closer, she noticed him smile a bit.

"I've got food in here ... and toys too. Won't you come in?" The cat felt a fox playmate would be most fun. Being a wild creature, he no doubt had fascinating stories to tell of the world. The fox looked around for possible villains, then decided to slip under the fence into the yard.

She showed the fox her food dish and watched him gulp down the remainders he found there. As he turned to leave, she pleaded with him to stay. At first uncertain, he scented the air and found no known danger and decided to rest ... at least for a bit. He sniffed at various things on the porch and sat in a sunny spot. Though he appeared to be at rest, the cat noticed his eyes always scanning the distance.

The cat, a wonderful hostess, soon began to show the fox her toys. Before long, the fox found he was having a good time with the cat. True, she was not a fox, but he was still enjoying her company. The two chatted and played for quite some time. A sudden noise ended the play. The fox noted another presence and quickly departed.



It was nearly a week before the cat saw the fox wandering near her house again. She called to him and he approached cautiously. Feeling it was safe, he joined the cat and they played. This time she took him through her private door into the house. Eyes glowing with amazement, the fox turned and sniffed rapidly. Never had he seen such a living area. When he asked what the cat did with all the things in the house, she answered they were used by her owner.

"Owner?" asked the fox. The cat explained that the owner lived in the house and generally took care of her. It was he who gave her food and toys and built the fence to keep the mean dogs out of the yard to protect her. "Like a mate?"

Looking down, the cat said it wasn't like a mate. The fox said he understood, but inside wasn't quite sure that he did.

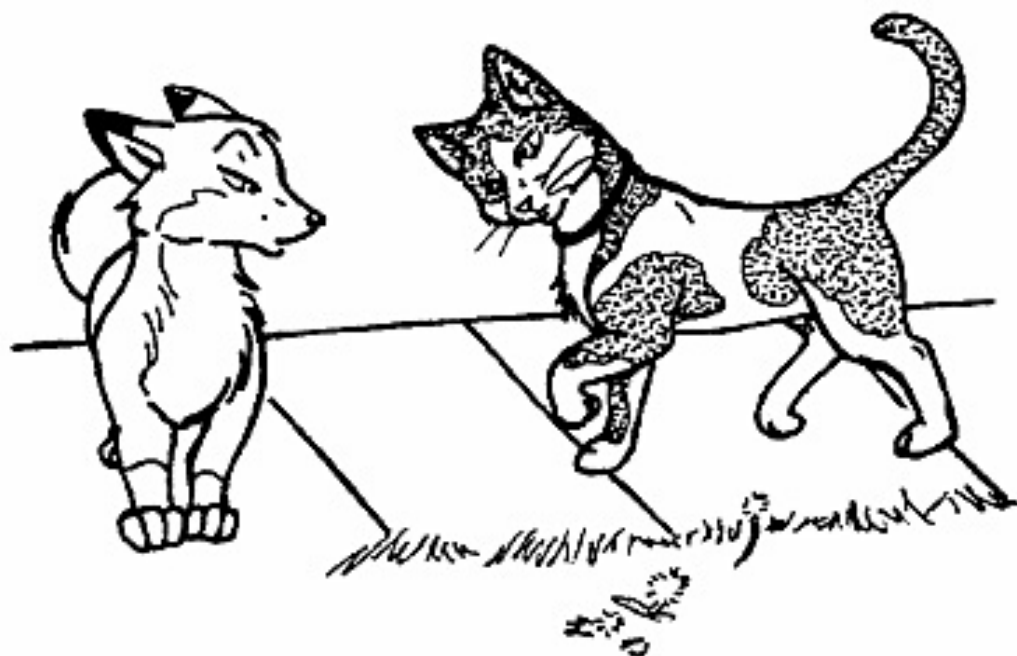


Once again, noise signaled the fox to danger. He began to run, but the cat tried to stop him. "It is only my owner," she told him. However, the fox knew that her owner was not a fox and he was not interested in dealing with anything powerful enough to have such control over nature. He leapt out a window and ran off. The cat dropped to the floor and sighed.

After many such visits over a long period of time, the fox got to see many places in the cat's home. Some mysterious, some similar. All carried the scent of man ... and possibly danger.

Of more interest to him were his feelings when he was away from her. He found he had grown very fond of the cat. True, she was very different than the fox. Different from any other fox he had met. Yet he felt a warmth toward her that made him sense she could be a good mate.

One cool night he visited her home and convinced her to come with him. She slipped out of the house and followed him along a seemingly never-ending number of paths until she felt she was quite lost.



"We are here," the fox barked as the cat walked close behind. She was uncertain of what "here" was. Her eyes could discern no difference between this part of the wilds and the rest she had seen.

"Not up here — you need to look deeper..." His muzzle pointed at a hole in the ground. As the fox slipped into the hole, the cat swallowed and did her best to keep up.

Inside the hole, the cat was a bit surprised. It was small, but still warm and somewhat comfortable. She found it not unlike the crawl space under her house. The fox explained that this was where he lived. He then explained how much he cared for the cat. She was pleased, and expressed her fondness for him.

Early in the morning, the fox woke the cat and took her home. By the time they arrived, her owner was already outcalling for her. As she walked toward the house, the fox smiled at her and said he'd be back.

True to his word, the fox was back that evening and the two played in the front yard through much of the night. The cat wished the fox could spend more time with her. "I do too," he replied. The fox explained how his home was far away and that he had to maintain watch over his land by traveling.

Over the next few days, as the fox traveled his land, he found himself missing the cat very much. Even though she was not a fox, he began to feel that it was not a big enough reason not to make her his own. He knew she had many dog and cat friends that she may wish to visit, but he felt that would not be a problem. She would be in his den or traveling with him most of the time, and that thought made him feel pleasure.

On his next visit to the cat's home, they played together as usual. When it came time for the fox to go, he sat close to the cat and asked if she would become his cat and come and live with him.

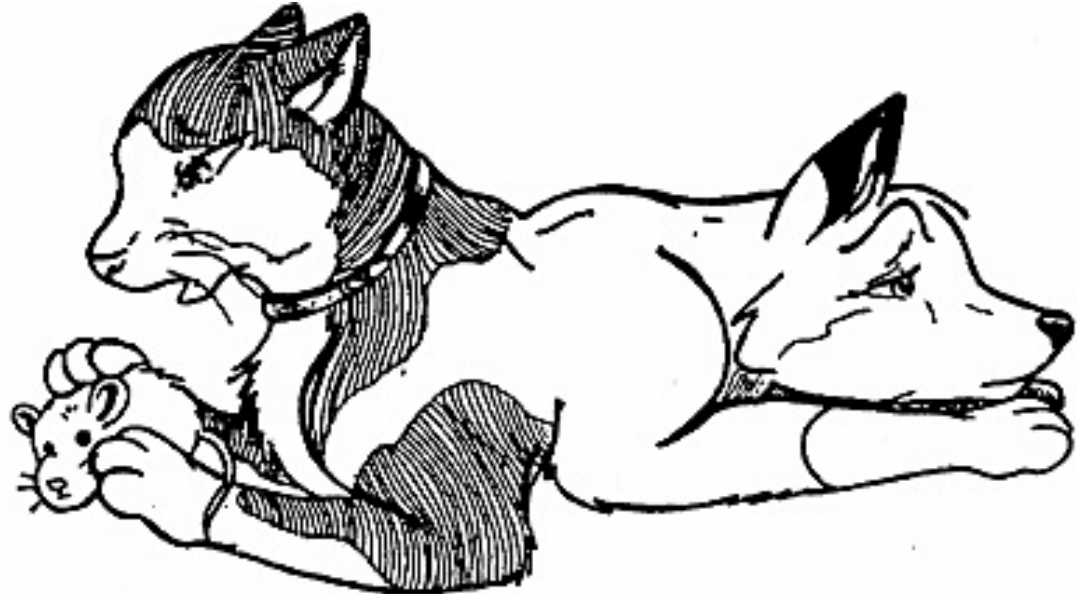
"Where?" asked the cat. The fox reminded her of his den in the woods. She thought for a second, looking at the house. "Where would I put all my toys?"

"Toys?" The fox hadn't considered this. He didn't need toys, being a bit of a wanderer. She could bring a few, he told her, but not too many.

The cat frowned. Looking at the house, she thought of all the things she had and all the things her owner gave her. Her change of posture told the fox many times.

She began purring deeply and asked, "Couldn't you live here?"





The fox explained that he could not. He didn't have an owner now ... and didn't think he could live with one.

"Can we just keep on the way we are?" she then asked.

He sighed. That was possible ... but now, with winter coming, he would not be able to get back to this part of his land as often. She frowned. The fox leaned over, licked her, and told her that she was very special to him and he would come as often as he could.

As the sounds of possible danger began to rise in the distance, the fox started to walk back toward the wilderness. The cat called out and said she was sorry. In a choked voice, the fox acknowledged his sorrow to her. Before he got out of hearing range, he turned and looked at his cat. She looked sad. "Please don't be too sad, my cat," he called to her. "You have a house and many nice things. In some ways I envy you. All I have is me and my freedom."

"If you were truly free," she called back, "you could live

here with me without fear. We all have our owner, whether it's my human or your lifestyle."

The fox turned quickly so as not to let the cat see him start to cry. "You're right," he barked as he walked further away. "We all have our cages..." Then more softly he added, "I just wish mine was more attractive to you than your current one is."

They both stated their desires to see each other. As the winter continued, the fox kept his promise of visiting the cat when he could. Each one was always a time of joy, and each goodbye a time of sorrow. Two worlds colliding ... but never really meeting.

One spring evening the fox lay in his den. His mind drifted to his cat ... and then, oddly, to the crawl space under her house. The thought made him sit up quickly. He thought again of how he missed his cat. Looking around his den, his mind began to wonder. Which cage was stronger ... and more desired?



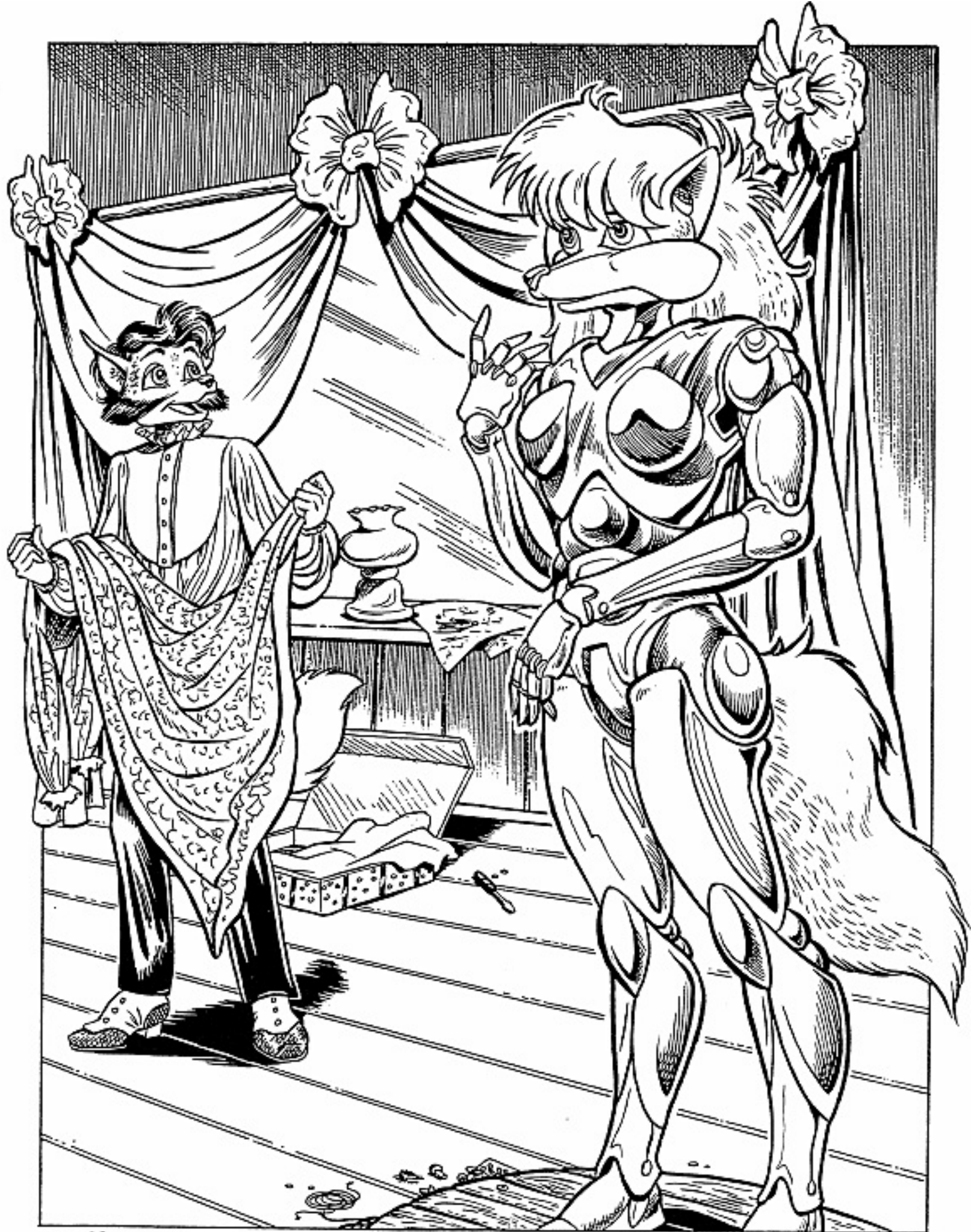
OKAY, CHRIS, I'LL HELP YOU STUDY FOR YOUR ENGLISH TEST. *≡*AHEM*≡*
"SOME PLANT NAMES BEGIN WITH THE PREFIX 'DOG.' FOR INSTANCE, THERE'S DOGWOOD, DOGROSE AND DOG VIOLET." NOW, CAN YOU NAME ANOTHER PLANT PREFIXED BY 'DOG'?



TELL ME, LENNA, DO YOU SAY YOUR PRAYERS EVERY NIGHT?

NO, NOT EVERY NIGHT. SOME TIMES I DON'T WANT ANYTHING!





"Worthington?" George called. "Algy, where are you?"

"Back here, George," came Algernon Worthington's answer.

George Bunbury made his way through the the tidy sitting room to the confused jumble of the workshop, which occupied the entire rear of Worthington's townhouse. George carefully picked his way past tables and benches overflowing with finely made gears, springs, tools, metal stock and paints. Only a newcomer might have noticed that, unlike a mechanic's or inventor's shop, there was not a single plan or blueprint to be found. This was an artist's studio. An artist of machines.

"Be right with you, George," came the voice, muffled from behind a curtain.

George couldn't resist flicking the switch on a small box, atop which were the figures of two duelists with swords. The swordsmen neatly saluted each other and proceeded to advance and retreat, thrust and parry, with a grace and smoothness that made one forget that they were propelled by a mechanism rather than muscle. George was irresistibly drawn to gaze at them from table-top level, marveling once again at the near perfect mimicry of life.

"Ah, George, I thought you had one of those at home," said Worthington as he emerged from behind the curtain.

"True enough, Algy. But I never tire of your mechanicals. Nor has the rest of Europe, I dare say."

"Oh, they seem popular enough. But I've never wanted for money, and building a clockwork toy or two has amused me enough to keep me from Ascot."

"One or two!" George exclaimed. "About thirty-two. Each one must have made your fortune all over again. I understand Prince Albert purchased 'The Grand Waltz' for Her Majesty Herself!"

"Oh, good heavens, George. The Waltz is three years old. Such a crude mechanism."

"Algy, you don't need to be modest with me. You'll just have to admit you're a flaming genius. Even the *Times* said you've brought more joy to Britain than Shakespeare."

"Now that's faint praise," Worthington huffed. "Perhaps I should animate the murder of Julius Caesar and see how joyful that makes them."

"I say, Algy, would you do that?"

"Come along, George! Of all the ideas! Certainly not."

"Very well, then. What are you up to behind that curtain this time?"

Worthington let a sly smile slip across his face. "George, you know I never talk about a work in progress. What if it I couldn't make it work?"

Mr. Worthington's Clockwork Hobby Takes a New Turn

By Dave White

Illustrated by Monika Livingstone

"You, Algy?" George laughed. "You could make the Creation of the World work. In full life size, in fact."

"Life size?" Worthington replied in mock astonishment. "That's never been done."

"You could do it, though. Will you join me at the Diogenes club for dinner this evening?"

"Only if it's a late dinner. I have a bit of work to finish tonight."

"Eight-thirty?"

"Fine," said Worthington. "Eight-thirty it is."

Worthington ushered his guest to the door and quickly returned to his studio. He threw back the curtain and opened a large parcel that had been delivered that morning and withdrew a new lady's dress. With the dress draped over his arm, he approached his latest and most ambitious work of art ... the epitome of clockwork fantasies.

She was indeed a full size clockwork figure, and he found it impossible to think of this as anything but *she*. The fine Swiss gearing was completely contained within her shapely female figure, powered by a set of exceptionally

powerful German steel springs. A cunning set of Belgian gyroscopes kept her upright. Even the fur was the finest French cosmetic, indistinguishable from living pelage. Only the eyes had baffled him. He could find no method to simulate or replace sight. Thus, he made her to follow subtle hand signals as he led her by the arm or follow a pattern of movements set in brass discs within her body.

He paused with the dress a moment. How did ladies get into these things? At last, logic won out and he touched the controls on her abdomen to raise her arms over her head. Then he carefully slid the dress over her head and adjusted it to fit.

Worthington brushed back her hair and regarded his work. Except for the vacant stare, she was perfect. Or was she? Worthington felt around her left hip for the spring trip and released it. There was a very soft whirr and click as the mechanism responded. The eyes blinked. The chest moved as if breathing, and in a sense it was. For he had given her breath for the power of speech.

"Good day, Mr. Worthington," she said. Her voice was an ingenious combination of reeds and fine music strings activated by her breath. It had a strange musical quality, as if she were singing each word.

"Good day, my dear," Worthington replied. True, she was a machine, but courtesy demanded courtesy in return. "Let's go for a stroll, shall we?"

She did not respond, of course, though if he had added a response to her voice control, his own voice would have ripped it. He took her arm and led her from the work stand. She let him lead her, taking subtle cues through the contact of his hand. Carefully, he led her on a turn around the workshop. His delight grew as she stepped with perfect balance. He stopped her, facing him, and stepped a few paces back.

"Come here," he commanded. At once, she walked toward the sound of his voice. "Stop," and she did so.

Abruptly, he was seized with a mad idea. He stopped her motor with a flick of a switch hidden in her flowing hair and rudely flipped her skirts up over her head. A flurry of adjustments and additions followed before he smoothed the dress back in place and again released the drive spring.

As before, he led her about the workshop on his arm. Then, he stopped and stepped in front of his creation.

"Good morning, my dear," he said with an excess of emphasis.

The figure gracefully extended a hand and said "How do you do?"

Worthington shook her hand excitedly. *Can I get away with it?* he wondered. There was only one way to find out.

• • •

They seemed an ordinary couple out for a morning stroll, enjoying London's rare spring sunshine. Their pace may have seemed excessively measured, or simply unhurried. No one really gave them a second glance.

"Worthington!" a voice cried ahead. Approaching was an acquaintance from the Diogenes Club. There being no hope of escape, he resolved to brazen it out.

"Hullo, Bainbridge. Wasn't expecting to find you in the neighborhood."

"Passing through on business, old boy. And who is this lovely creature?"

"This..." Worthington hesitated just an instant as his mind raced. He hadn't expected to meet anyone he knew at this hour. "This is my niece, Cecily, from Northumbria. I've mentioned her before."

"Good morning, my dear Cecily," Bainbridge said, extending his hand.

"How do you do?" Cecily responded, her own hand just missing Bainbridge's. He caught it adroitly and gave it a gentle squeeze.

Bainbridge looked at her smiling, and at last took note of her unfocused gaze.

"Have we forgotten our spectacles this morning?" he chided. "You'd not need your uncle's arm for a touch less vanity."

This caught Worthington off guard and he spoke without thinking.

"She can't see, Bainbridge."

He was immediately taken aback. "Oh! Oh, my dear girl, I am sorry."

Cecily tilted her head, smiled and said, "Not at all."

Worthington had meant this response for another compliment, but it seemed to have worked in the clutch.

"She's been blind since her first day in the world," Worthington truthfully said. "I brought her 'round to enjoy the morning sun."

"Of course," said Bainbridge, looking a bit pale on account of his gaffe. "Well, must be off. Good day." He retreated with obvious embarrassment.

"Good day, Bainbridge. See you next week." said Worthington.

When he was out of sight, Worthington swung in front of Cecily and looked intently at her face. She did have that unfocused gaze so characteristic of the blind. "I wonder..." he mused.

• • •

"Algernon, you've finally cracked." George said. "Now, there's no doubt that this ... lady is the finest thing

you've ever done. It's fantastic! But you can't seriously expect to —"

"Trust me, George, it will work!" Worthington replied. He bustled about the workshop, seizing various tools and tinkering with the interior of his now unclothed creation. He had removed much of the torso paneling and the intricacy of the mechanism was fully revealed. "Listen."

Cecily began to sing. The aria was brief but tremendously demanding. She executed it with captivating grace. George, despite himself, was enthralled even after she finished.

"Oh ... ahhh," George stammered, remembering himself. "It's certainly lovely. Did you really put it over on old Bainbridge?"

"Completely," he answered, adjusting a brass disk in Cecily's chest. "He looked her right in the eye and never caught on."

"Well, Bainbridge usually doesn't catch on. But to try to fool old Gilbert."

"Pah! It's only an audition. All I need is the dimensions of the stage. I'll regulate her for some simple movements. Gilbert and Sullivan sit so far back in the house they can hardly see who's onstage in any case. When I'm ready to present her, it'll make fine publicity."

"If they don't catch on, Gilbert has a fierce temper, I've heard. He might not take kindly to having his audition spoofed."

• • •

London's West End had been the home of the new style of entertainment that had been all but invented by Gilbert and Sullivan — the musical — a blend of opera and melodrama. It was instantly and immensely popular but it required a rare type of performer, one that could both sing and act. As most actors had never had cause to develop as singers, and vice versa, auditions for talented and promising performers of necessity preceded every new production.

George approached the the renowned composer and his lyricist, seated as Algernon had predicted, in the orchestra almost beneath the balcony.

"Thank you so much for having the sheet music sent 'round," said George. "And for this chance for Miss Cecily to be heard."

"Not at all, Bunbury," said Gilbert. "Old school ties and all that. She is going to sing just the *one* song?"

"We do have other business, you know," said Sullivan sourly. "Taking up time on some country lass..."

"It's for friendship, Sullivan," Gilbert replied. "Polite applause, lovely voice, well done, and we're off. *Send her on, Mr. Callon!*"

The stage manager gestured to Worthington, who gave Cecily the gentle nudge that started her carefully measured routine. She stepped out onto the stage and turned to face the echoing cavern of the all-but-vacant house.

The rehearsal pianist struck the opening chords, and Cecily began to sing. Her subtle movements of hand and body were utterly convincing to George, even knowing who — *what* — she was. He wondered if Worthington had switched her for a live singer at the last moment. No. No one could have reproduced Cecily's range and control.

She breezed through the difficult refrain. At the end, both of the impresarios sat speechless, staring straight ahead. Cecily gave a smile, a small curtsy.

Immediately, Gilbert and Sullivan were on their feet, applauding wildly. Gilbert shouted "Brava!" Cecily turned to exit.

"Wait! Don't go!" shouted Gilbert. He clambered out to the aisle and rushed to the stairs at the edge of the stage. Sullivan and George followed a bit more sedately.

Worthington, hearing the commotion, stopped Cecily in the wings and turned her around, firmly holding her hand. Gilbert nearly collided with them in his haste.

"Oh! My dear girl," Gilbert gasped. "That was magnificent! Astounding! Never in my life have I heard the like."

"Your much too kind," Cecily responded. "Thank you so much."

Gilbert was nearly beside himself. "Such a voice! Worthington, where have you been hiding this treasure?"

"As I said, she's my niece from the north country, come to visit London," said Worthington. He quickly switched off her voice before she could speak again.

"You realize, of course," said Sullivan, arriving on the stage, "we simply must cast her in our next production."

"Yes, yes," said Gilbert, "beyond doubt. We *must*."

"Gentlemen, please!" said Worthington. "We very much appreciate your enthusiasm, but Cecily had no intention of performing on stage. As you well know, she's blind."

"Balderdash!" said Gilbert. "Le Chatain is blind as bat. You should have seen him in *Oedipus Rex*. The only part that looked like acting was at the end, when he had to act blind!"

"I have seen Le Chatain," Worthington said testily. "He's been acting for thirty-five years. While Cecily's in London, I am responsible for her well-being. She managed well enough today, alone on an empty stage. What about a stage full of props and other performers? What if she should lose count of her steps? She could walk right off the edge of the stage into the orchestra pit!"

Gilbert had clearly not considered that. "Well, I wouldn't wish to put her in jeopardy in any way. But there must be a way..."

"Perhaps an aria," said Sullivan. "A solo piece from our next production. We can't close the grand drape with this elaborate set. The stage hands will make the changes in full view of the audience. She could just stand near the wings."

"Yes, of course," Gilbert agreed. "You said yourself that she could navigate a stage alone."

Trapped, thought Worthington, while he made a show of pondering this. Even so, he thought, this is the sort of publicity I had in mind.

"All right," Worthington said at last. "Perhaps just for the opening week..."

• • •

"I! I am to take her to the theater!" said George. "Have you lost your reason?"

"Now, George," Worthington said soothingly. "You can guide her as well as I can. If I lead her everywhere like a child's toy, how well have I done my job?"

"Are you sure she can manage the hansom cab?"

"More sure about that than anything. I hired a cab, sent the coachman off, and spent two hours trying out and making adjustments. Just guide her right hand to the grip next to the door and squeeze the trip beneath her middle finger. She's been regulated to get in and sit down. Getting out, just reverse the process."

"It's just fortunate that all cabs these days are of uniform size. And at the theater?"

"Lead her to the floor mark in the right wings, and trip the release in the small of her back when the stage manager cues her. Then lead her back to the dressing room when she comes off."

"And you? Where will you be?"

"Gilbert has graciously provided a fine center seat in the orchestra. I want to see how Cecily performs, and I haven't seen this play!"

• • •

Worthington was dazzled by the play, and the audience roared its approval at the end of the act. The brief intermission did not allow time for the complete set change, so the final arrangement of the set-pieces would be done with Cecily singing.

The last few people were settling in their seats when the manager made the announcement.

"And now, with a song from *The Mikado*, Miss Cecily Worthington."

The word of Gilbert and Sullivan's discovery of the blind

singer had been the talk of society for weeks. The audience applauded and awaited her eagerly.

The maestro struck up the tune and, Cecily began the beautiful number. The audience sat entranced.

But theaters are ripe for disasters, and no expense or reputation will divert them. As the set-piece descended from the fly, it pushed a curtain in the left wings too close to a lamp. It smoldered for just a moment and then burst into flames.

"Fire!" came the cry from the front row. The smell of smoke seemed to reach every nostril simultaneously. In a moment, the audience began to rise, to move with increasing apprehension, to change from audience to mob. Worthington rose also and felt the growing panic around him. He realized that he was in the middle of the mass of sentient, and felt his own animal instinct rise.

The maestro urged the orchestra to greater volume, and Cecily responded with greater volume still. Her voice rang through the house, cutting through the rising din.

The audience hesitated.

Cecily took a step forward and continued the song, the fire still burning. If *she* was not afraid....

A stage hand cut the rope holding the curtain and it crashed to the stage. Others heaved buckets of water and sand on it. The stage crew stomped and beat out the last flames and swiftly dragged the drapery off stage. All that remained was the smoke. And Cecily, finishing her song.

The audience applauded, cheered, stamped their feet, and generally behaved with no more decorum than the common patrons of a music hall in Soho. In the wings, George applauded as wildly as anyone and turned Cecily about, pressing the spring trip to send her back for a curtain call. Four times.

In truth, only one person in the entire hall didn't applaud. Worthington alone realized what a close-run thing it all was.

• • •

Gilbert and Sullivan caught a glimpse of Cecily as Worthington exited the dressing room. She sat at the dressing table, her face buried in her folded arms.

"She's resting," Worthington said. "Of course, you realize I cannot allow her to continue."

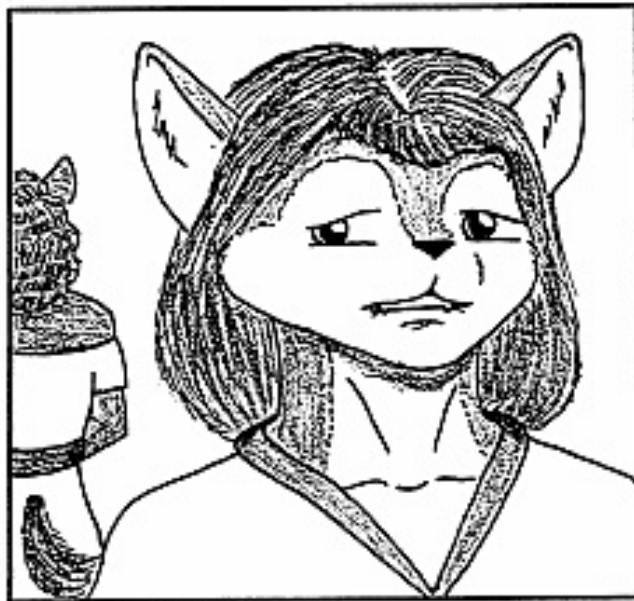
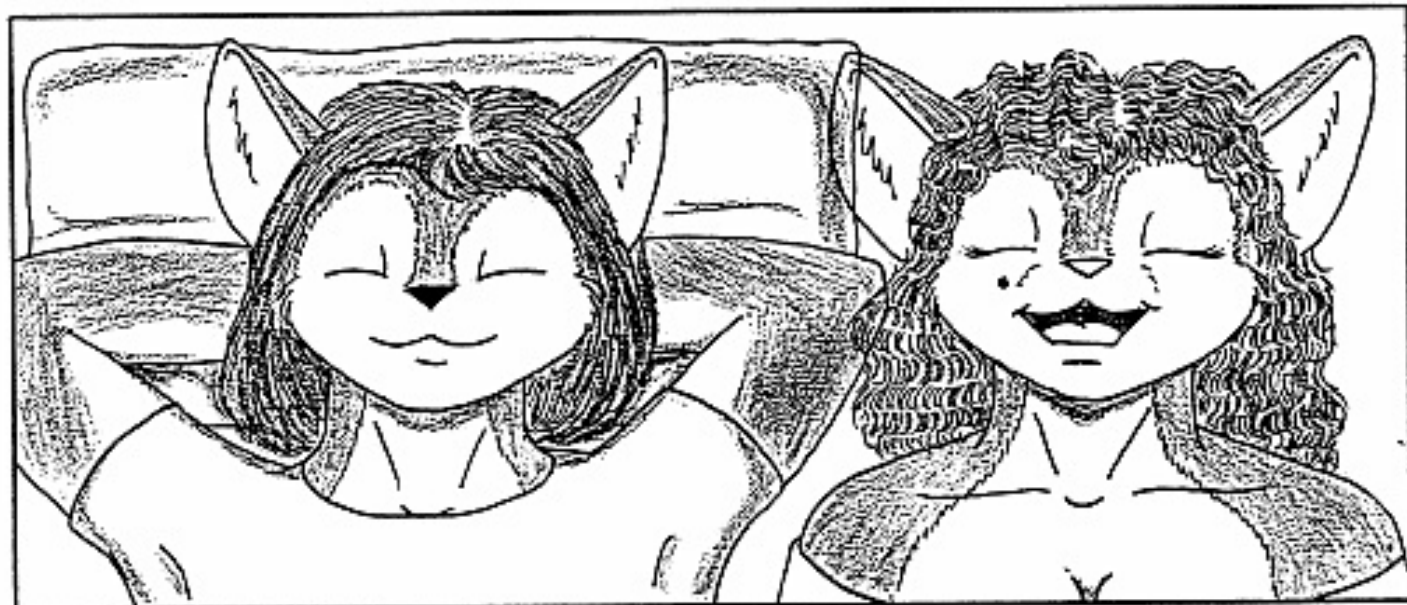
"Now, Worthington, don't be hasty," said Gilbert. "Why, she prevented a panic tonight. She sang on like a trouper!"

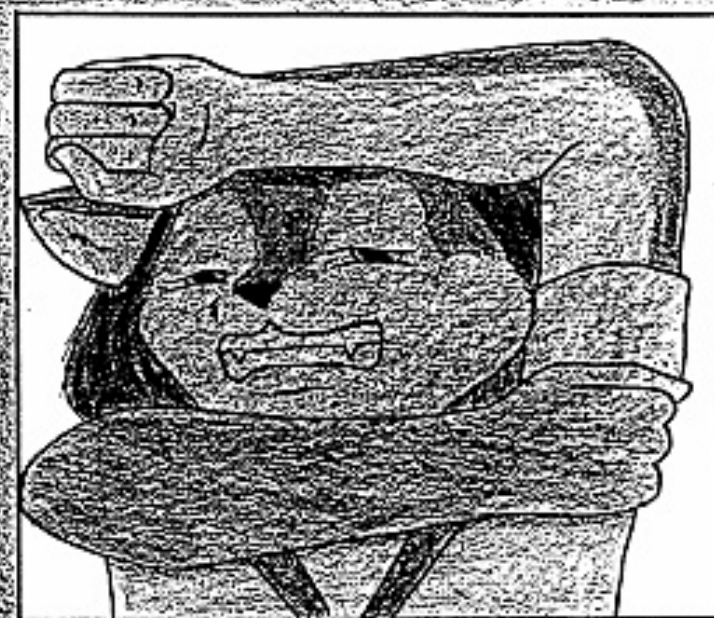
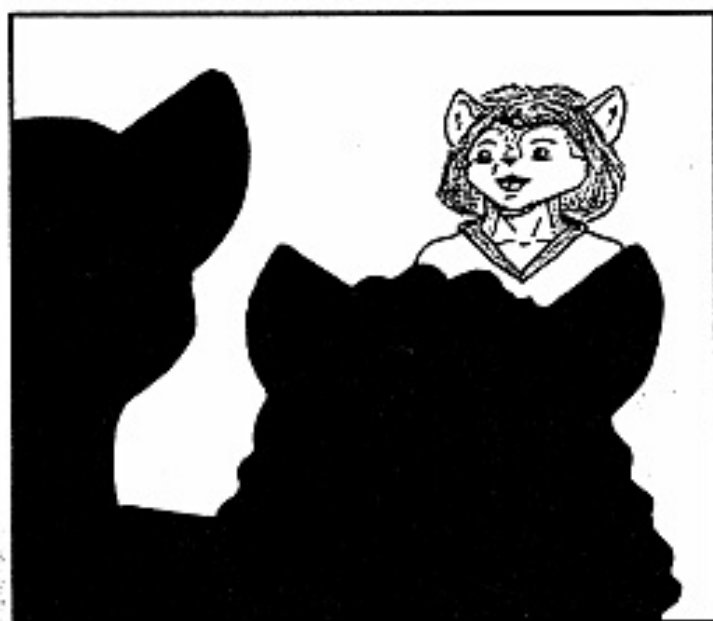
"Gentlemen," said Worthington. "Do you have any idea how terrifying a fire is to a blind person? She couldn't have run. She didn't know where to run. George couldn't even get to her with all the commotion backstage. She carried on because she couldn't do anything else!"

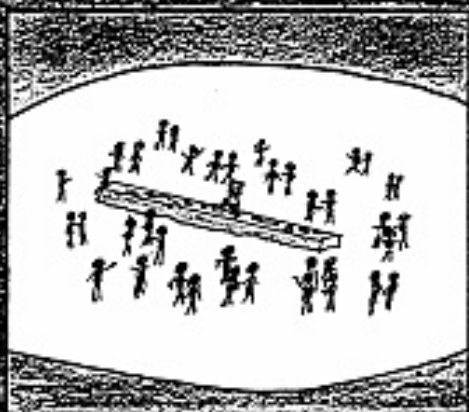
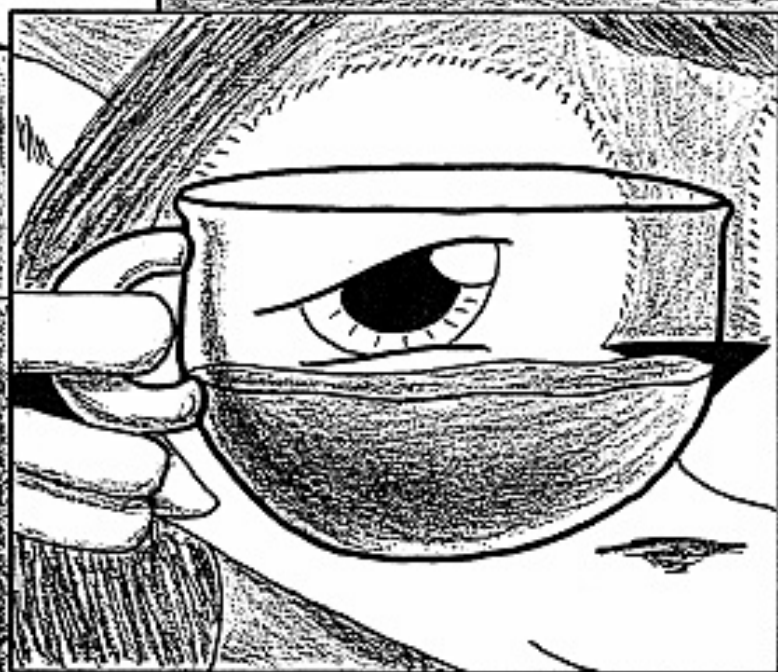
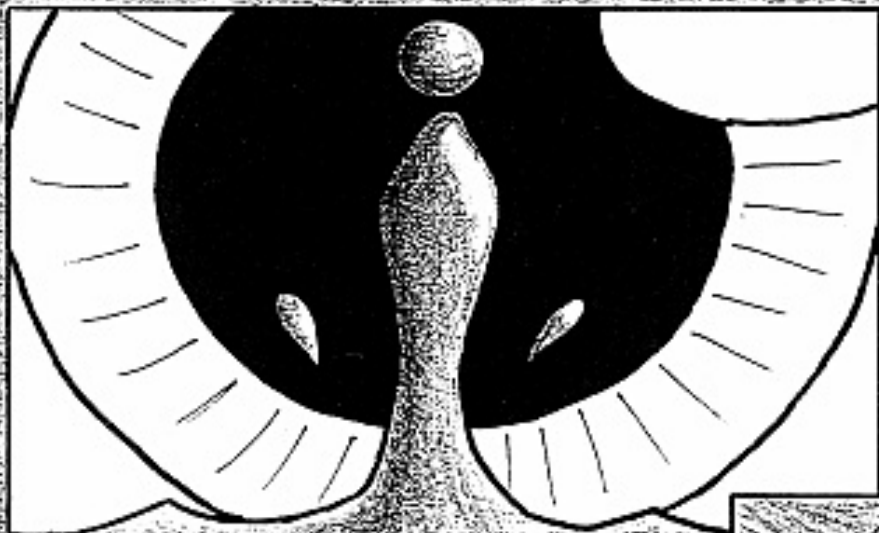


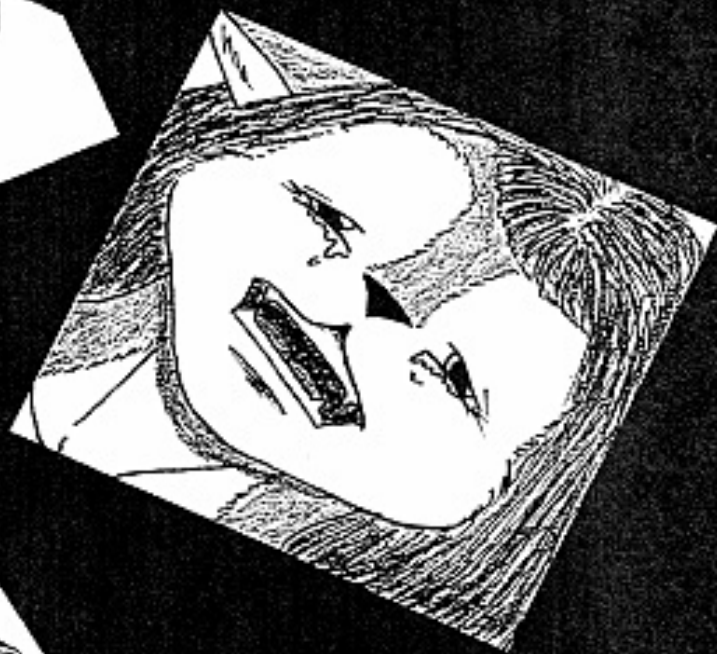
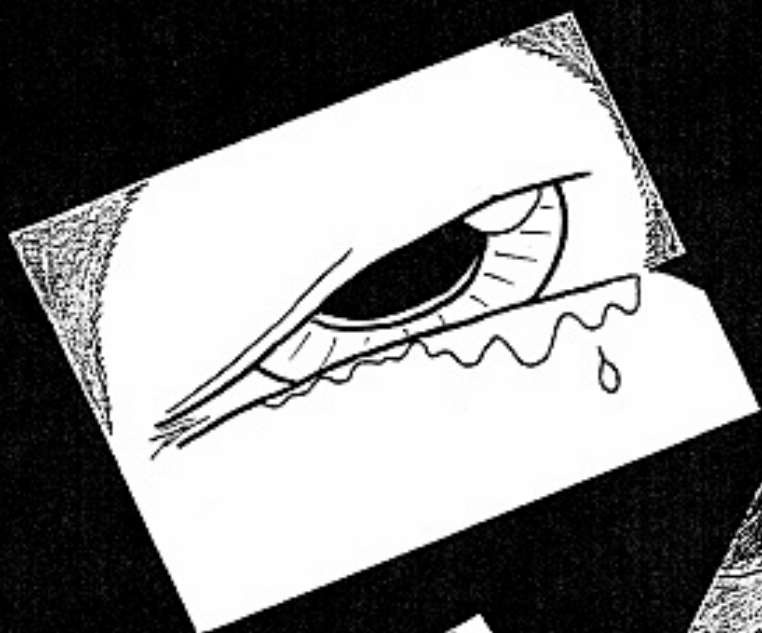
ALONE

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"IF I TELL
YOU HOW I
FEEL YOU
MIGHT HARDEN
AND I'M
SCARED OF
BEING LONELY
AND OF DYING
WITHOUT LOVE"
TAKE ME HOME
JULIAN LENNON





I WANT TO KNOW WHICH DAMNED SOUL
CORKED OFF A NUKE INTO THAT ARTILLERY
WITHOUT MY AUTHORIZATION!

WHEN THIS OBJECTIVE IS SECURED,
EVERYONE WILL DOWNLOAD THEIR
FIRE CODES TO ME, FLANK!

ALL CRAFT, STATUS
REPORT! OVER!



EMPIRES

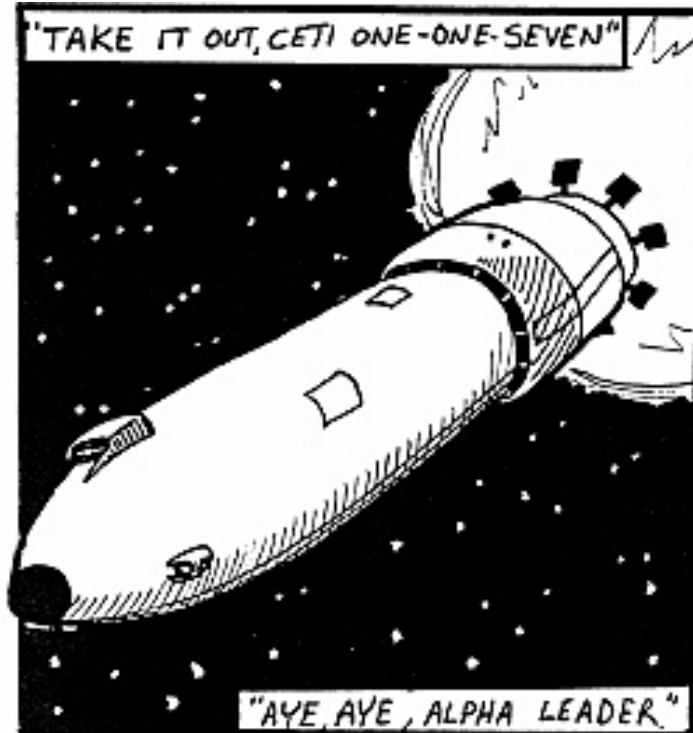
ALPHA LEADER, THIS IS CETI ONE-ONE SEVEN.
WE HAVE A RETREATING LINE OF IRRYKANDI
GOING TOWARDS THE STARPORT, AND
MANY UNIDENTIFIEDS RUNNING
THROUGH THE STREETS--

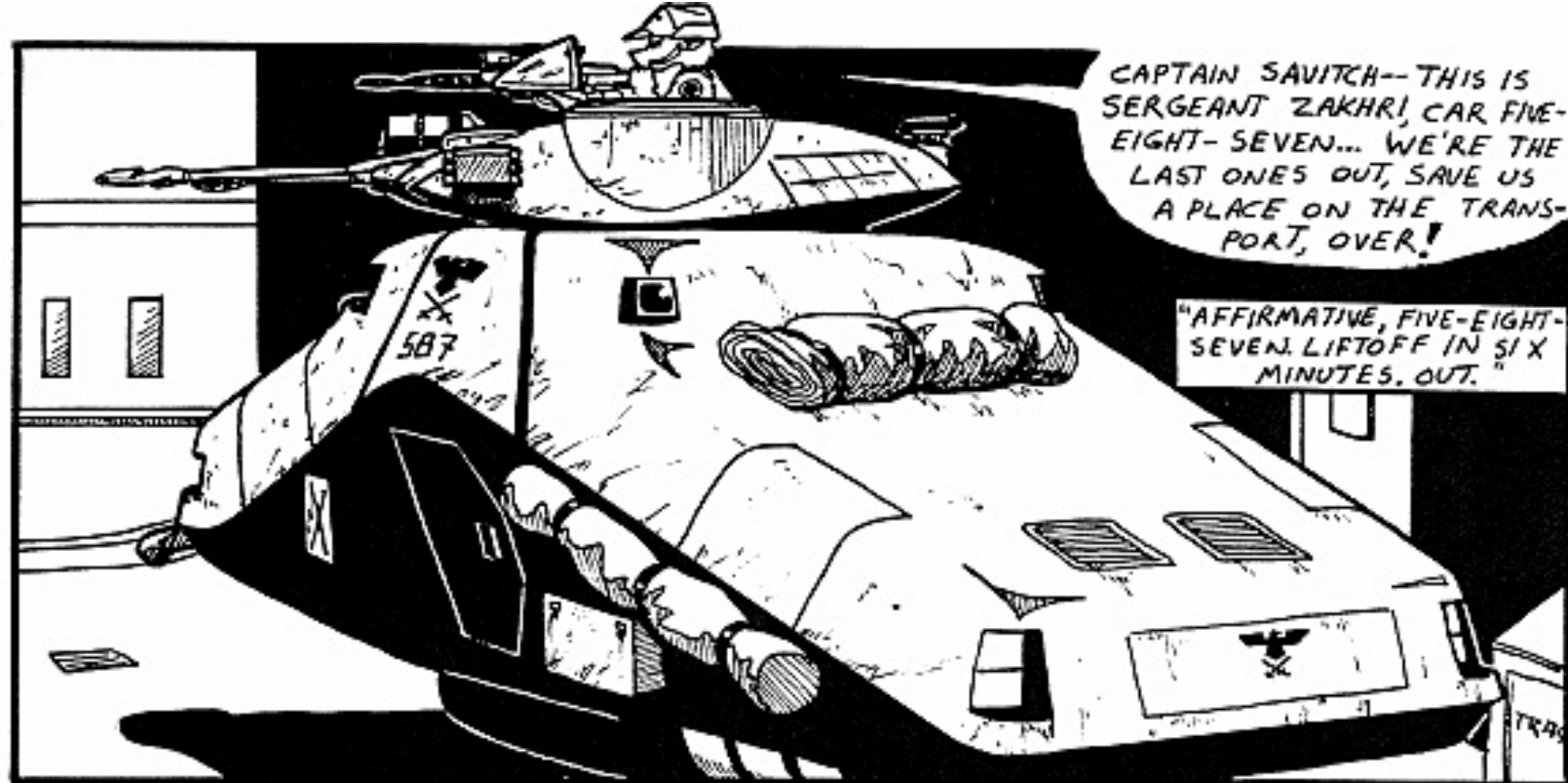


...ALSO, THE
TOWN HALL SEEMS TO BE
UNDAMAGED, BREAK...

...SHALL WE DISPATCH?
OVER.







ALRIGHT, DRIVER, STARPORT IS JUST AROUND THIS CORNER AND DOWN FOUR BLOCKS.

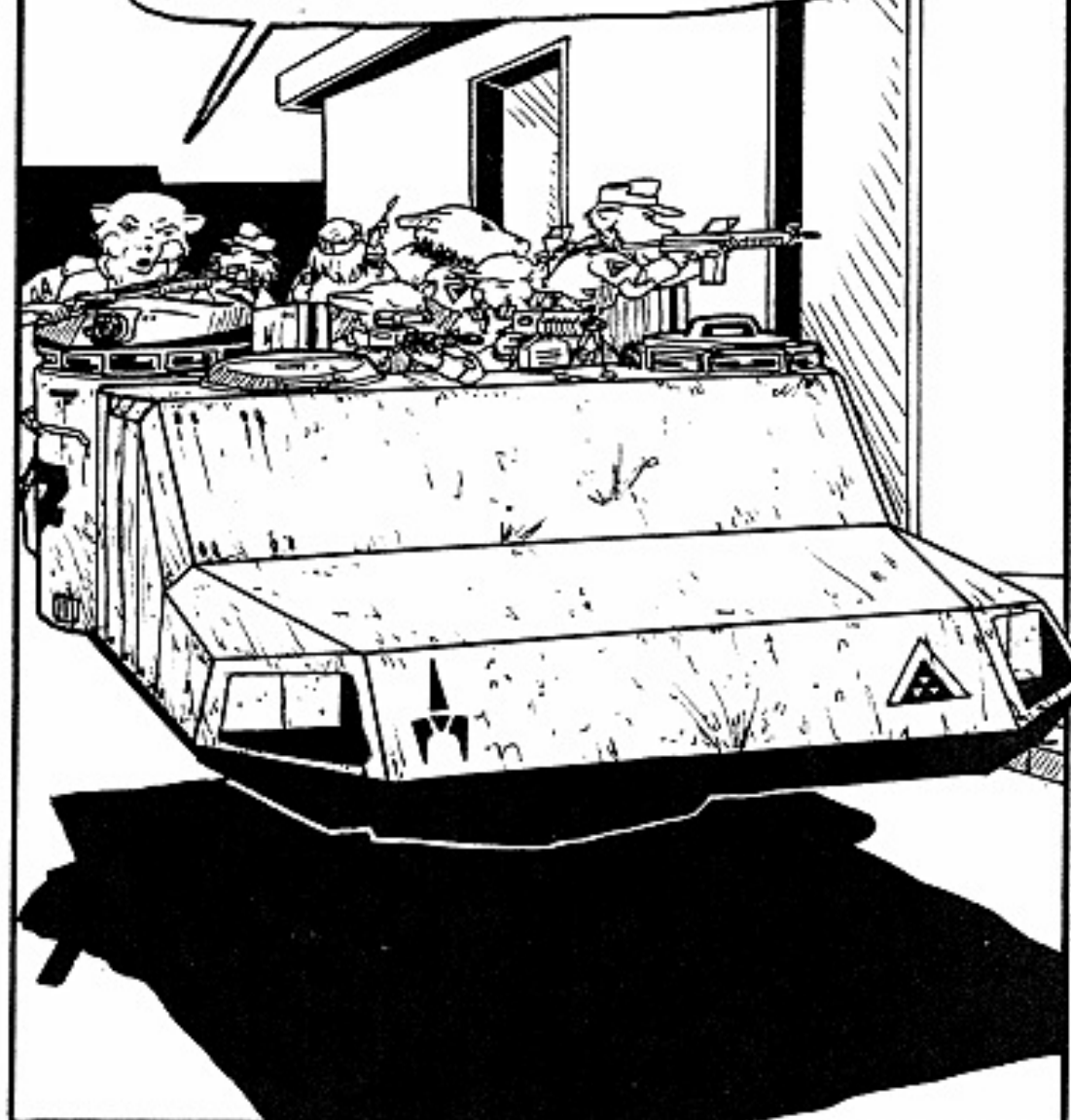
THINK YOU CAN GET US OUTTA HERE IN SIX MINUTES?

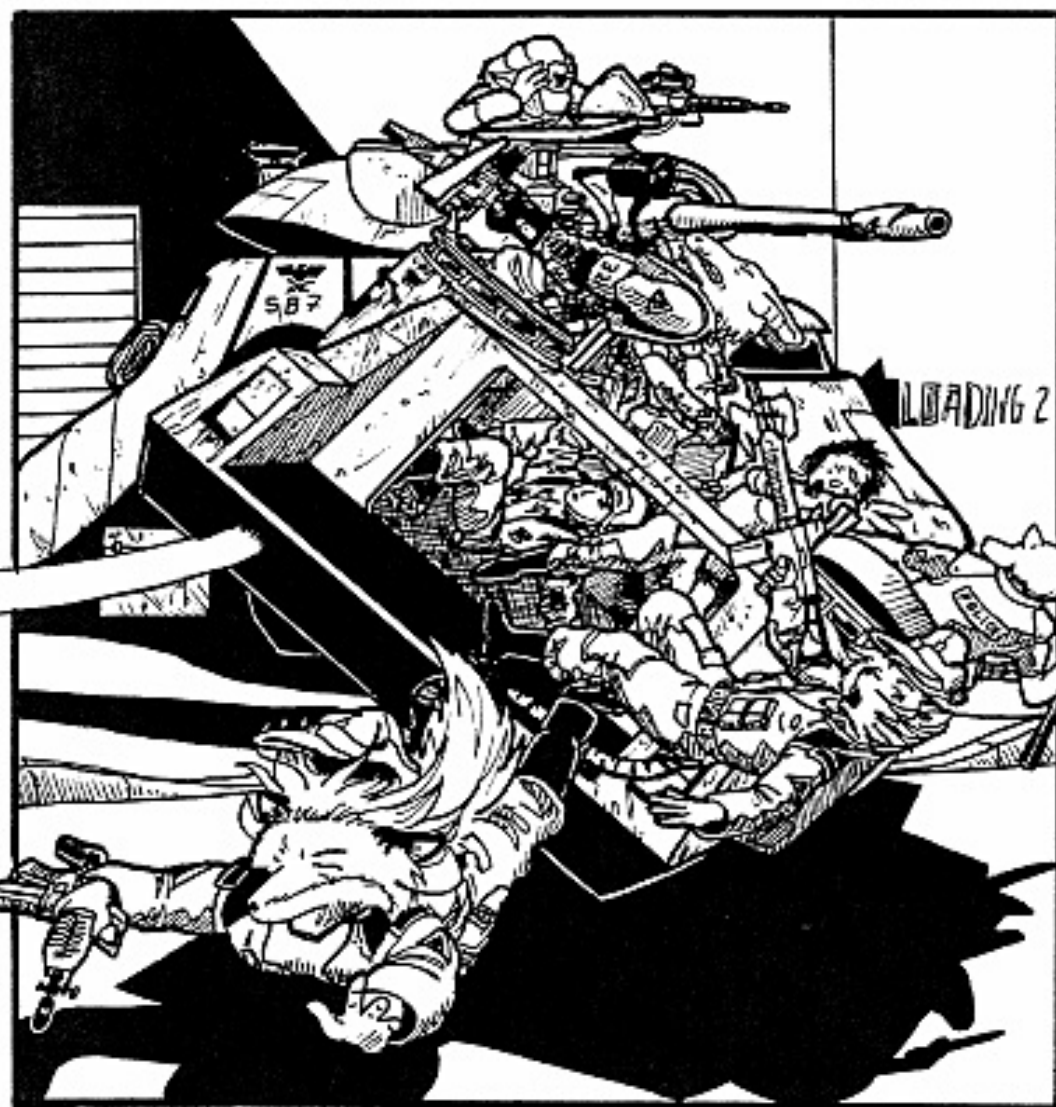
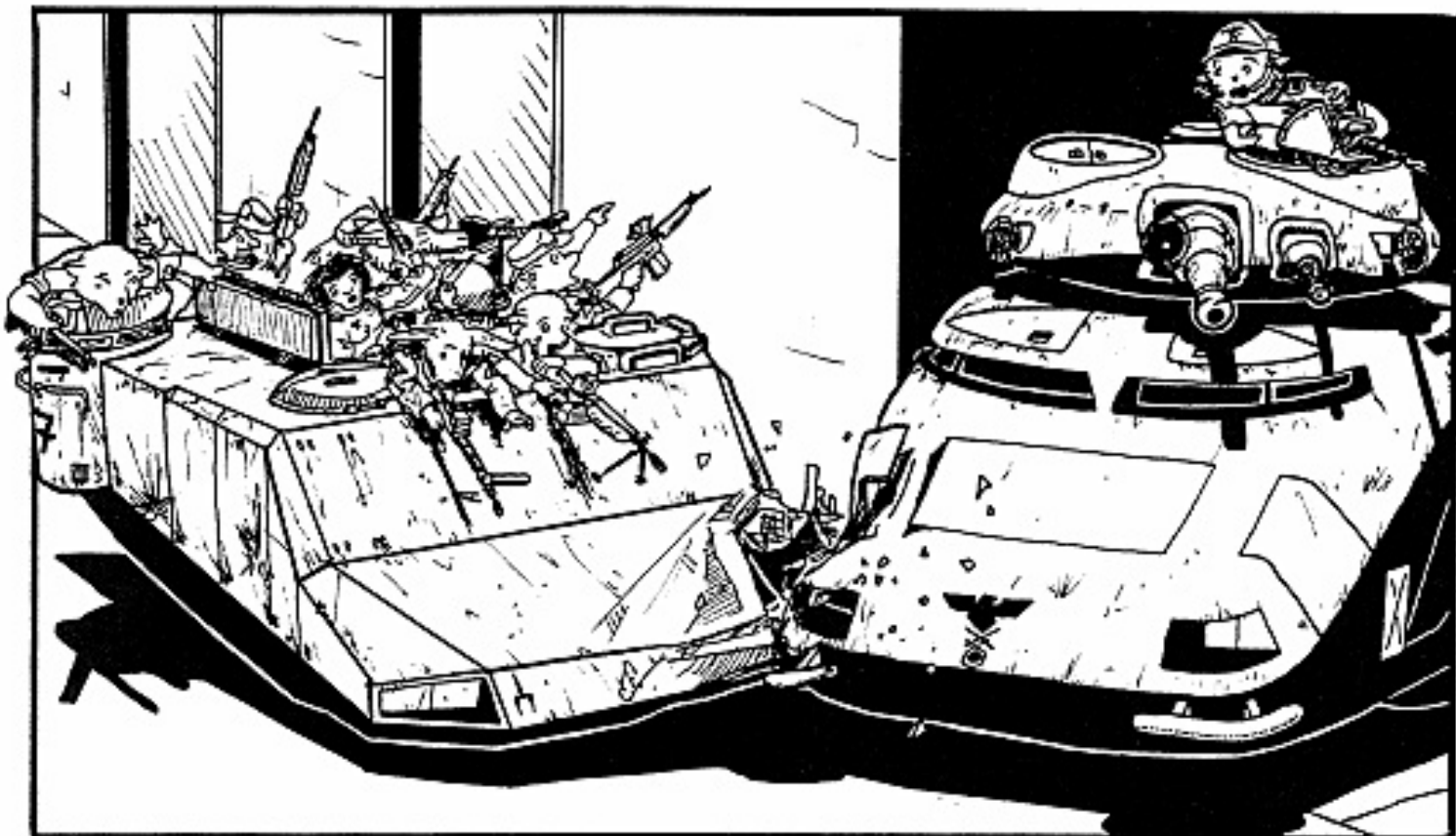


WE'RE OUTTA THIS SHITPOT, SARGE! HANG ON!



PUSH IT OUT, ADB! CIRCLE AROUND THIS BLOCK AND GET US TO OUR LANDING FORCES!





GUNNER! REPORT!

oohhh...



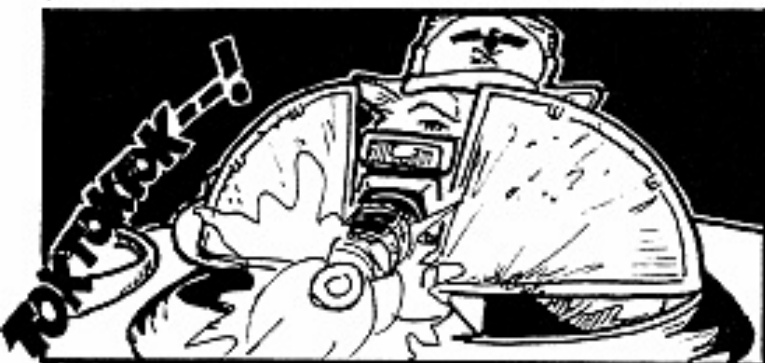
DRIVER! REPORT!

oohhhh...



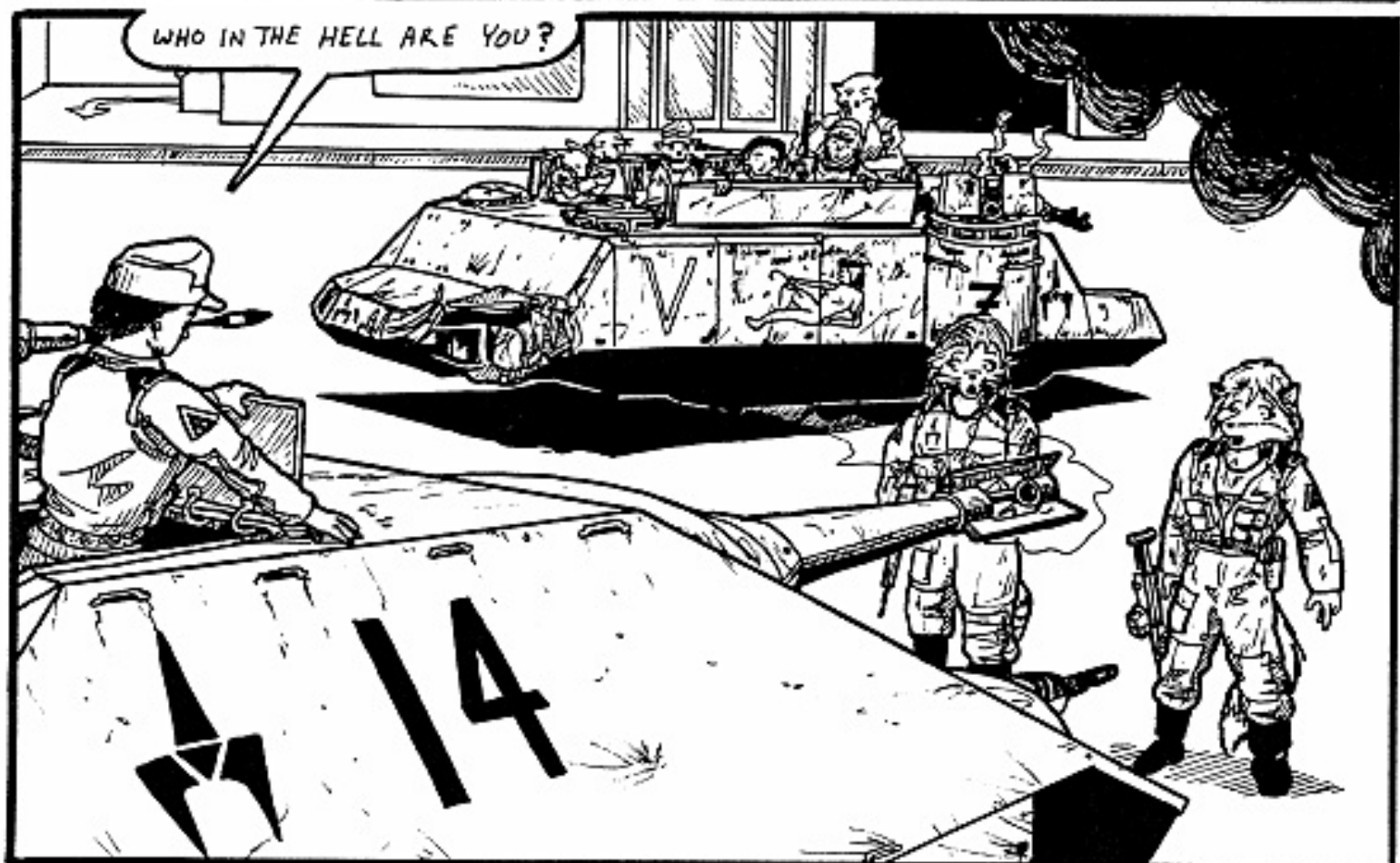
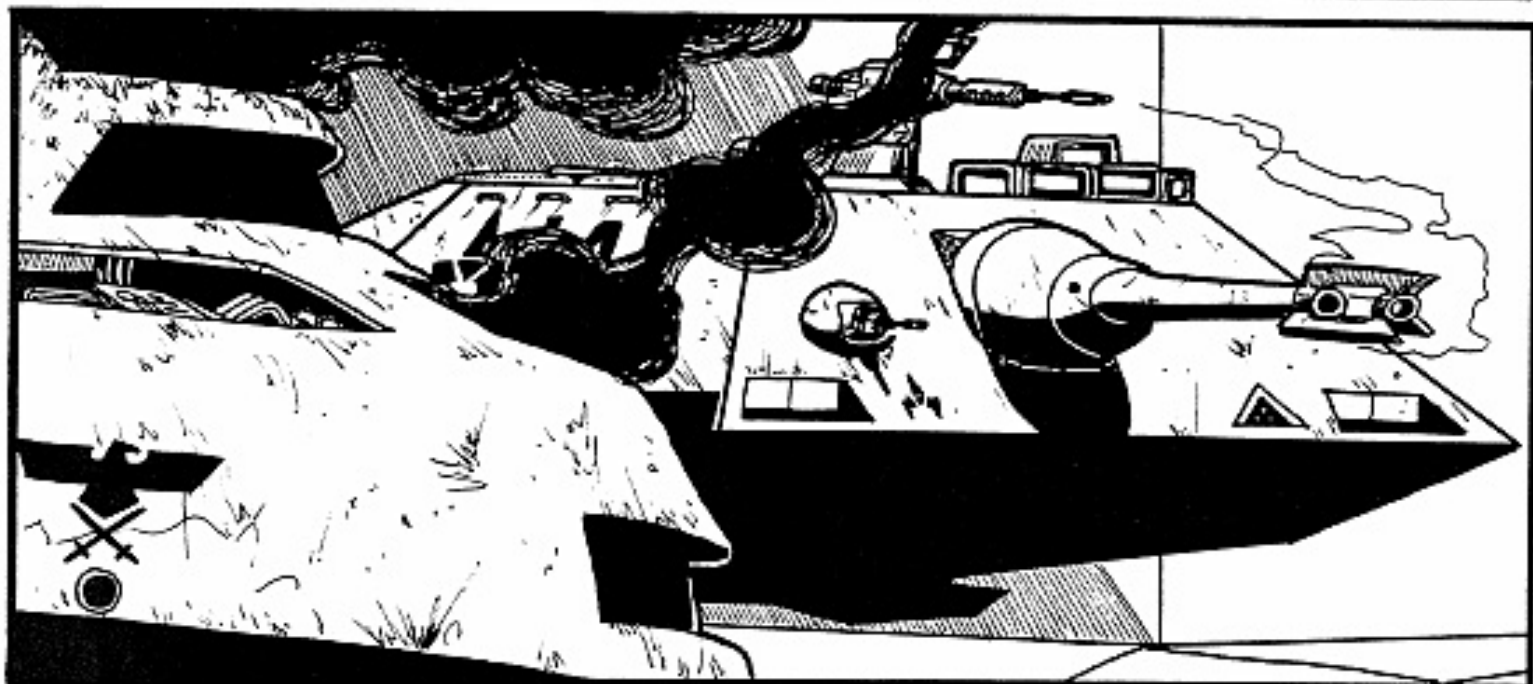
ADB! GET TO HIS REAR!

SHIT! GRENADE LAUNCHER!
GET HIM FIRST!



GET OUT OF HERE! I'LL TAKE
CARE OF BARONA AND CHENNAULT!



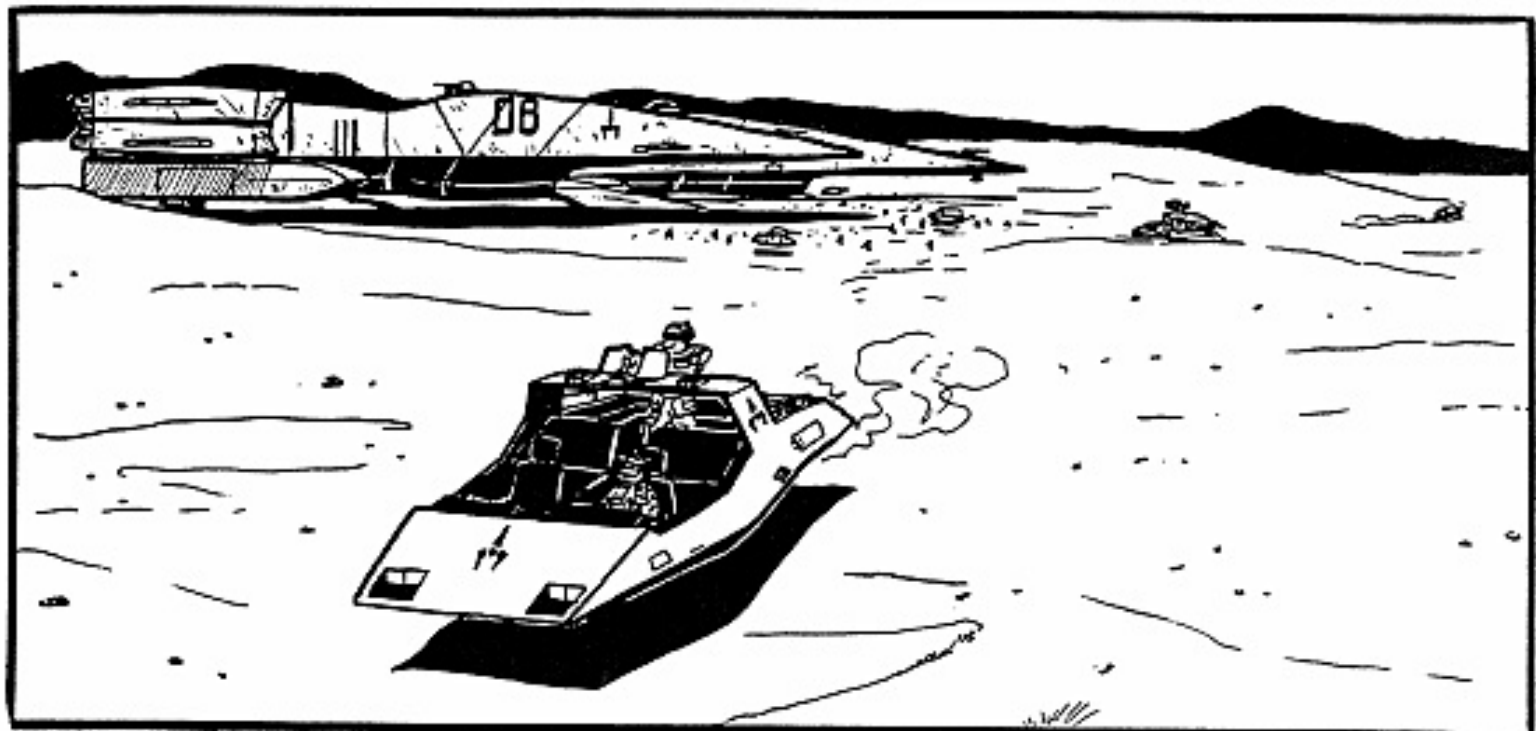


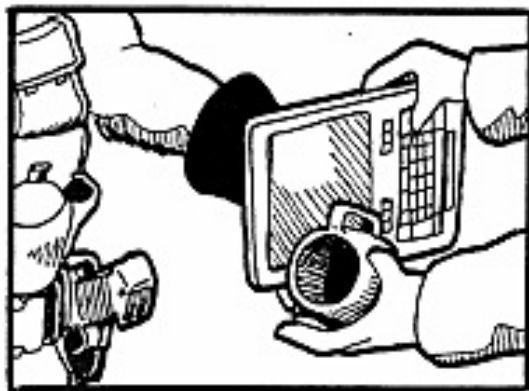
"... THEY SAY THEY'RE SURVIVORS FROM THE ORIGINAL GARRISONS THAT GOT OVERRUN OVER A MONTH AGO! THEY'VE GOT DEAD AND WOUNDED, AND ONE PRISONER! OVER!

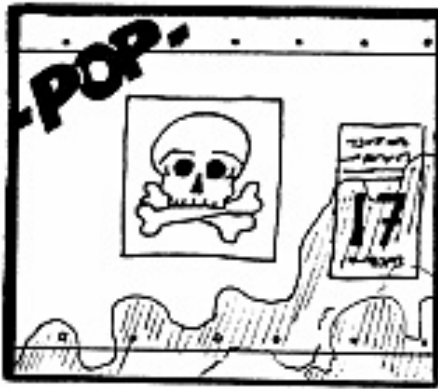
"ALRIGHT, OMEGA LEADER, GET TO THE STARPORT AND TRY TO HOLD THOSE TRANSPORTS. BREAK--

--LIEUTENANT NOIR! GET TO THOSE SURVIVORS IN TOWN AND SEE WHAT THEY'RE ABOUT! TAKE A CAMERA! ACKNOWLEDGE, OVER!"

NOIR
HERE,
MA'AM!
I'LL TAKE
CARE OF
IT!
OUT!

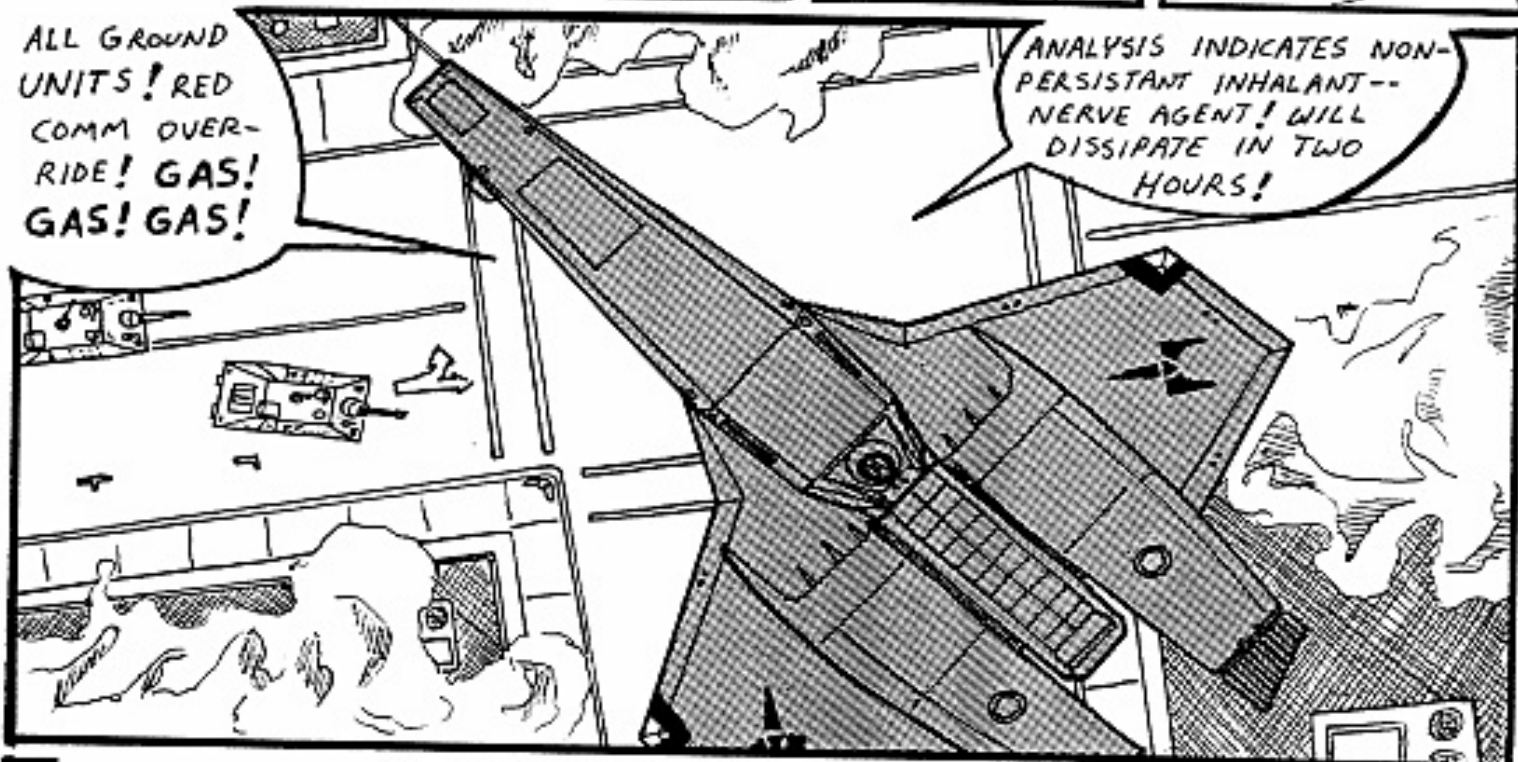






ALL GROUND
UNITS! RED
COMM OVER-
RIDE! GAS!
GAS! GAS!

ANALYSIS INDICATES NON-
PERSISTANT INHALANT--
NERVE AGENT! WILL
DISSIPATE IN TWO
HOURS!



HOLY THYSSA! THE
CIVILIANS!

OH, GOD--

HHGGGHHH--!

HK!
HK!



MASKER ENGAGED, MA'AM. THEY'VE LOST TRACK OF US.

THE GAS IS SPREADING RAPIDLY THROUGH THE TOWN. WITH LUCK, THE CENTRALS WILL BE BLAMED FOR IT.

I CANNOT BEGIN TO TELL YOU HOW THRILLED THAT MAKES ME, CAPTAIN ROTA.

MIKHEL...

...IF THE FIELD-MARSHAL HAD NOT BEEN SO SLOPPY, THIS DEFEAT WOULD NOT HAVE HAPPENED. ARE YOU WITH ME?

YES. BUT IT'LL BE A TOUGHER FIGHT THAN THE ENEMY...

MIKHEL, HIM AND PEOPLE LIKE HIM ARE THE ENEMY.

THE CENTRALS ARE JUST PEOPLE I SHOOT.

CONTINUED...



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YARF!

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