

Issue Four

\$3.00

# YARF!

THE • JOURNAL • OF • APPLIED • ANTHROPOMORPHICS



"Rose Garden"

# Monika Livingston

## Price List - 1990

### Black & White Character Drawings

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

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

### Color Character Drawings

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

### Full Color Paintings

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

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

### Matting

#### For drawings & paintings

|               |           |
|---------------|-----------|
| Up to 11 x 14 | \$5 - 10  |
| Up to 20 x 30 | \$10 - 25 |



### Name Tags

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

### Logos

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

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

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

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

### **NOTES**

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

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THE • JOURNAL • OF • APPLIED • ANTHROPOMORPHICS

## This Issue

- Front cover: "Rose Garden" \_\_\_\_\_ Monika Livingston  
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3. "That's the Last Time..." \_\_\_\_\_ David Cannon  
4. Patten's Pontifications \_\_\_\_\_ Fred Patten  
5. Freefall \_\_\_\_\_ Mark Stanley  
6. "YARF! Labs" \_\_\_\_\_ Mark Stanley  
8. "Cat Toy" \_\_\_\_\_ Bryce Nakagawa  
9. Empires: "Ace of Spades" (part 4) \_\_\_\_\_ Chris Grant/Dan Flahive  
19. "Cory" \_\_\_\_\_ Zjonni  
20. "The Star" \_\_\_\_\_ David White  
30. "Fymlin" \_\_\_\_\_ Edd Vick  
31. "Images" \_\_\_\_\_ Maggie De Alarcon  
37. Robert & Katrina: "Deadline Dialog" \_\_\_\_\_ Kris Kreutzman  
39. "Gimmick" \_\_\_\_\_ Scott Alston  
40. Portraits \_\_\_\_\_ Tom Verre  
42. "Ice Cream Wars" \_\_\_\_\_ Monika Livingston  
43. "Mint Julep" \_\_\_\_\_ Monika Livingston  
44. "Hold That Pose" \_\_\_\_\_ Eric Nelson  
45. "One Fine Day..." \_\_\_\_\_ Roy D. Pounds  
48. Book Bites \_\_\_\_\_ Taz  
47. "Midnight Gab Session" \_\_\_\_\_ Monika Livingston  
50. "Well, Doc, This Vixen..." \_\_\_\_\_ Ruben Avila  
Back Cover: "Eat Your Heart Out, Leonardo" \_\_\_\_\_ Lance Rund

## Staff

- Jeff Ferris \_\_\_\_\_ Copy Toner Stain  
Generator  
Bill Fitts \_\_\_\_\_ Official Crayon Taste  
Kris Kreutzman \_\_\_\_\_ Testers  
Lance Rund \_\_\_\_\_ All those nasty,  
Tom McDaniel \_\_\_\_\_ nasty words  
Dave White \_\_\_\_\_ Stamp Lickers  
Kris Kreutzman \_\_\_\_\_ Bank Robberies  
John Cleese \_\_\_\_\_ Minister of Silly Walks  
B.O.C. \_\_\_\_\_ Fat of Unknown Origin

## Subscriptions

YARF! is sold on a per issue rather than calendar basis.

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YARF!  
P.O. Box 1200  
Cupertino, CA 95015-1200

Messages:  
(415) 433-5457

## Coming up Next Issue

"Empires" continues  
More from Fred Patten  
More "Robert & Katrina"  
More "Freefall"

Fiction from Watts Martin  
Article by Dave Bryant  
Art by Monika Livingston  
and other things besides...

YARF! The Journal of Applied Anthropomorphics. Issue Nr.4, May 1990. Published by YARF! P.O. Box 1200, Cupertino, CA 95015-1200. All art and stories © 1990 by the respective artist or author. All other material © 1990 by YARF! No material may be reproduced without permission except for reviews with proper credit. Contains no saccharine. Close cover before striking. In stereo where available. For external use only. Aim at base of flames and sweep back and forth.

# Flaming Hair balls

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

A couple of evenings ago we heard about the death of Jim Henson. It just doesn't seem all that long ago that The Muppet Show was on the air, or that the Muppet Movies were in the theaters. So many of us learned from Sesame Street, or Fraggle Rock... his magic has helped shape a generation.

Jim in his own way legitimized anthropomorphics. Where else could you see frogs, pigs, bears, birds, dogs, flowers (or anything else, for that matter), putting some of Hollywood's best through the wringer on a weekly show? He was a person who could, through fun-loving entertainment, educate... who brought us some of television's finest... who created something that all ages could enjoy... and used anthropomorphics to do it.

Finding all the things to say about Jim Henson could fill a book. Suffice to say, though, he will be sorely missed by us all.

For all that he gave us and for the legacy that remains...



Photo: San Jose Mercury News

**JIM HENSON**  
1936 - 1990

On to other business.

Thank-you's are in order to everyone who has contributed to and subscribes to YARF! A few people, however, are due special thanks: Chris Grant, Monika Livingston, Kris Kreutzman, Mark Stanley and Fred Patten for making a contribution to every issue. To Dan Flahive for the really nice letter with the drawing as seen in the last issue, and for helping out Chris Grant with inking and lettering on

Empires. To Ruben Avila and Pete Glaskowsky for lots of help and support.

Best wishes to Susan Van Camp on the publication of Varcel's Vixens.

This would also be a good time to again state our editorial policies. YARF! is a general-audiences magazine, and therefore does not accept sexually explicit material (our rule of thumb: can you show it to your mother?). This does not mean that ours is a bland, flavorless magazine (as you have seen)...

Like all magazines of this type, our material comes from our readership. We welcome, nay, NEED, your contributions. Contributors whose material is printed receive two (or more, for large submissions) free issues, in addition to any subscription they may have. However, we must make it clear that we do not print all of the material we receive. Our choices are made upon the quality of writing, artistic talent, or humor of a piece... also, our editorial license allows us to do just that. Edit. We like to work with artists and writers on pieces that show potential, and do our best to help our contributors do THEIR best. It is our policy to run the finest material that we receive.

The deadlines, as you may have noticed, are set out many issues in advance... and these deadlines are firm. Exceptions may be made if we are kept apprised on the progress on a piece, but for everyone's sake, allow plenty advance time for us to prepare your work for publication. (You may also have noticed that the deadlines have not changed... we do our best to be consistent.)

Oh, and one last note to folks sending checks... PLEASE make the checks payable to YARF! (not to any of the editors). Our bank is so much happier when this happens...

We'll waste no more of your time with our blather... on with the issue! ☺

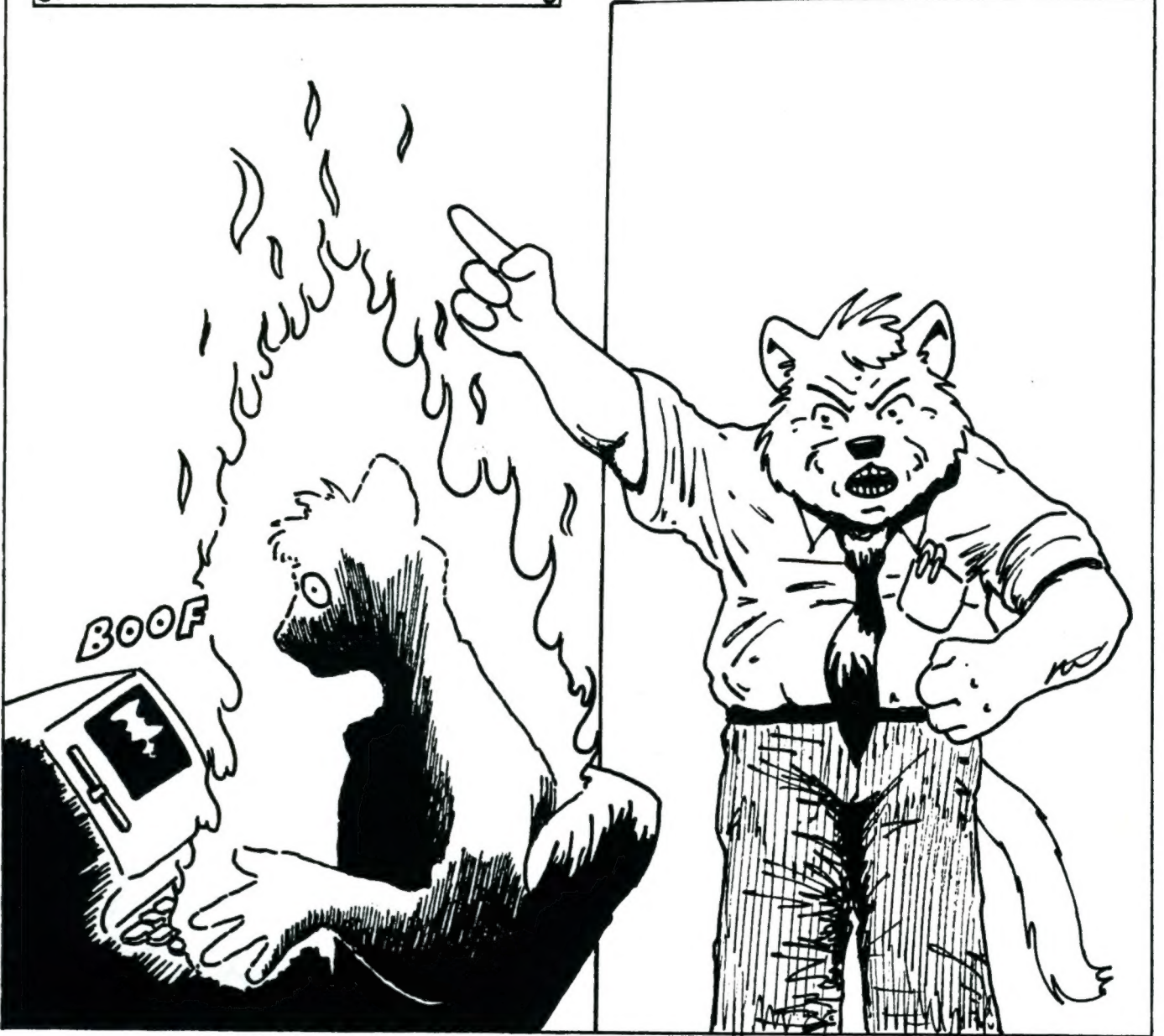
• • •

## DEADLINES... DEADLINES... DEADLINES...

Once again, here are the deadlines for future issues. Remember, these are firm dates. We look forward to your contributions.

- Issue 5, June 16, 1990
- Issue 6, July 28, 1990
- Issue 7, September 8, 1990
- Issue 8, October 20, 1990
- Issue 9, December 1, 1990
- Issue 10, January 12, 1991
- Issue 11, February 23, 1991
- Issue 12, April 6, 1991

NO SMOKING  
NO SCREWING AROUND  
NO SPONTANEOUS COMBUSTING



DAVID CAMERON © 1990

OKAY, WIGGINS! THAT'S THE LAST TIME YOU DO THAT HERE! YOU'RE FIRED!

# Patten's Pontifications

## Review: The Eleventh Hour

Reviewed by Fred Patten

*The Eleventh Hour: A Curious Mystery*, by Graeme Base. New York, Harry N. Abrams, Inc., October 1989, 32 art pages + 7 text pages, \$14.95. ISBN 0-8109-0851-4.

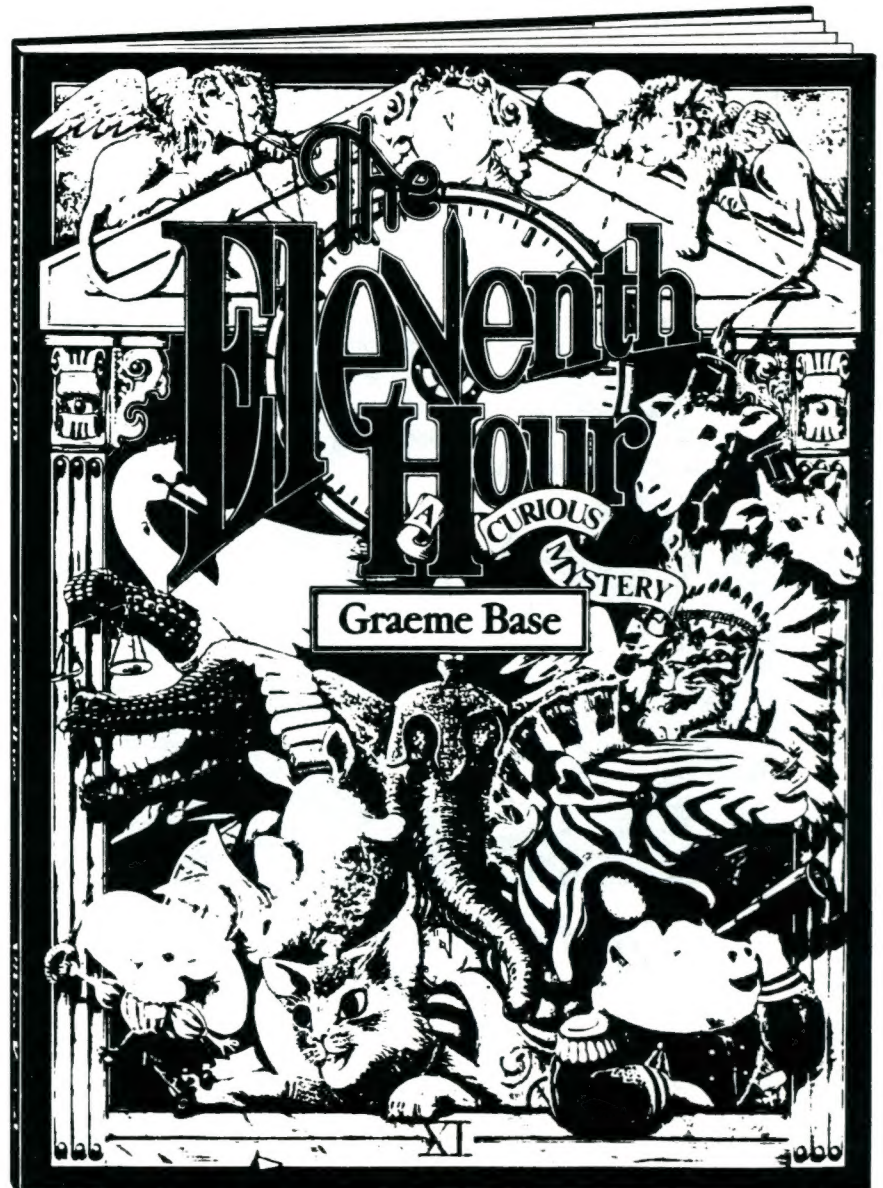
You may not instantly recognize the name Graeme Base, but you are almost certainly familiar with his alphabet book, *Animalia*, by now. "Unruly unicorns upending urns of ultramarine umbrellas", and so forth. Published in America in 1987, it was a best-seller fine-art book for all ages despite its "children's picture book" categorization. It established the young Australian artist's reputation as a master of wonderfully rococo visual fantasy in the tradition of Brian Froud and Patrick Woodruffe, but specializing in anthropomorphized animals rather than on creatures of faerie.

Now Base has followed up *Animalia* with another art book in the same vein. *The Eleventh Hour: A Curious Mystery* is an ostensible children's picture book with rhyming text. It is Horace Elephant's eleventh birthday, and the wealthy young pachyderm organizes a sumptuous party for himself at his luxurious estate. A number of his animal friends spend the day at party and at play, only to be rudely confronted by a dramatic mystery in the evening. The reader is warned on the first page to watch for clues and hidden messages in each picture. The fact that some of these clues require the reader to be able to read musical notation, Morse code, mirror writing, rebuses, and Egyptian hieroglyphics, to name just a few of the different codes, emphasizes that this is much more than just a children's book.

But it is an art book for all ages. Young children can enjoy the lush paintings full of colorfully costumed animals without worrying about the puzzle. The main purpose of the mystery is to give older readers a justification (as if any justification were needed) to study the paintings especially closely, instead of breezing through the book — to consciously see all of the fine details hidden in each complex illustration. Horace is a very wealthy elephant, and his home is a palace rich in architecture and interior decor of all history from

the temples of Karnak to the drawing rooms of Mozart's patrons. The party costumes of Horace's animal guests are a treat for connoisseurs of lavish clothing and jewelry.

The solution of the mystery is given, with a listing and explanation of the hidden messages, in a sealed section at the back of the book. You had better check the copy of *The Eleventh Hour* that you pick up before you pay for it, because of eight copies at the bookshop where I got mine, only two were in fact sealed. The seal is a paper wafer designed by Base especially for this book. You will miss a minor boy delightful bit of his art if your copy of the book does not have it.



"When you're hot, you're hot!", and right now Graeme Base is very hot! Harry Abrams brought him from Australia to America for a publicity tour to promote this book, and he was quoted at length in the literary press. Animalia is still selling briskly, and Abrams has also brought out a Base-illustrated picture-book edition of Lewis Carroll's "Jabberwocky" (from Through the Looking Glass). Base's first work, a 1983 Australian picture book featuring all Australian animals, My Grandma Lived at Gooligulch, has been reprinted and is again available. (The Australian Book Source, U.S. office at 1309 Redwood Lane, Davis CA 95616; \$12.95; ISBN 0-944176-01-1.) And Base has just been commissioned to create the official poster commemorating 1990 as International Literacy Year, by proclamation of the United Nations General Assembly. The full-color, original poster, described by Base as "an Anthropomorphic vision of global harmony", is available in the U.S. for \$6.00 apiece from American Library Association - Graphics, 50 East Huron St., Chicago, IL 60611 (payment by cheque or money order, please).

rats — and he innocently brings tragedy and doom to all.

The jacket blurb describes The Coachman Rat as "a brilliant and provocative" retelling of "the fantasy-horror tale" of "Cinderella". I hadn't known that "Cinderella" was a horror tale, but these are revisionist times. We must rely upon those who are wise enough to see beyond the surface to reveal to us the true meaning of things. (Such as all those helpful souls who pointed out that Disney's "The Little Mermaid" is demeaningly sexist and an insult to womanhood.) How many orphans went hungry due to the taxes to pay for the Prince's ball? What about all the wretches suffering in the royal dungeons while the Prince poses as the benevolent sovereign? Never thought about them, didya!?

This "gripping fantasy" is more than just a retelling of "Cinderella". There are equally strong portions of the Pied Piper legend and of the French Revolution's Reign of Terror in it. Wilson blends them together very imaginatively. Yet the novel reeks of a self-conscious cleverness that stifles any real emotion. All of the characters are stereotypes, introduced one at a time and displayed to be seen for what they are before being activated to react against the other stereotypes. Amadea (Cinderella) is Goodness; the Prince is Nobility; Biggs the drunkard is Greed; Dr. Richter the scientist is Intellectual Pretension; Jenkins the scholar is Humanity; the scheming Devlin is Politics, John the palace guard is the Easily-Misled Masses — and Robert is Everyman, the Fool of the Tarot deck, an innocent who has the capacity and the opportunity to develop into anything, and who is molded through carelessness and callousness into a grim punisher. There are some witty lines, some convincing philosophical arguments, and some unexpected plot twists. But it remains a clever puppet play rather than a live drama. The puppets perform until all of their strings have been cut. Then it's all over. Applause for the author, please. ☺

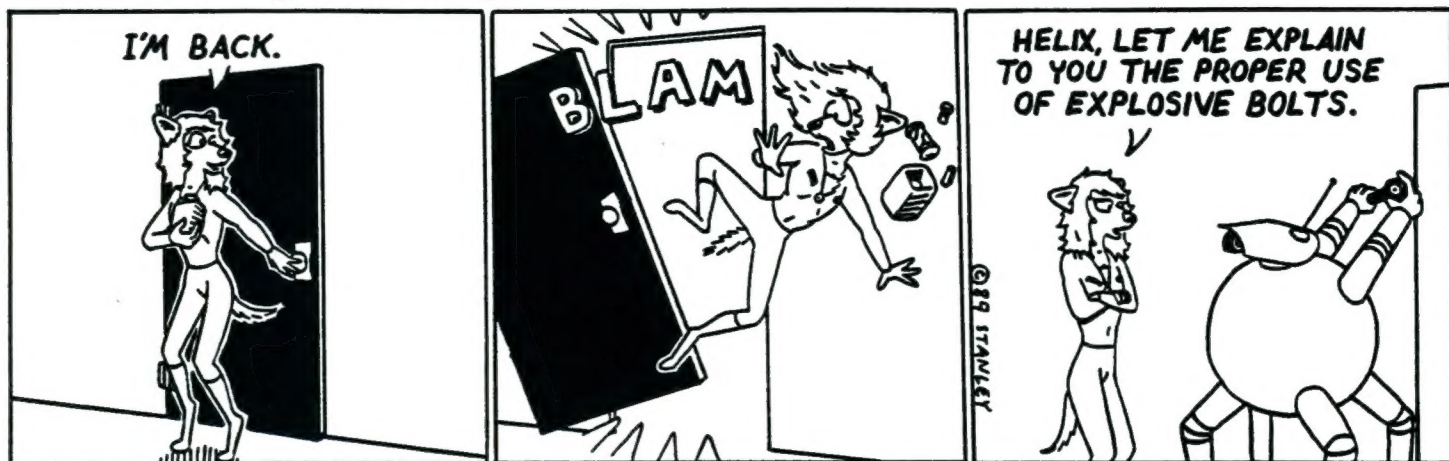
## Review: The Coachman Rat

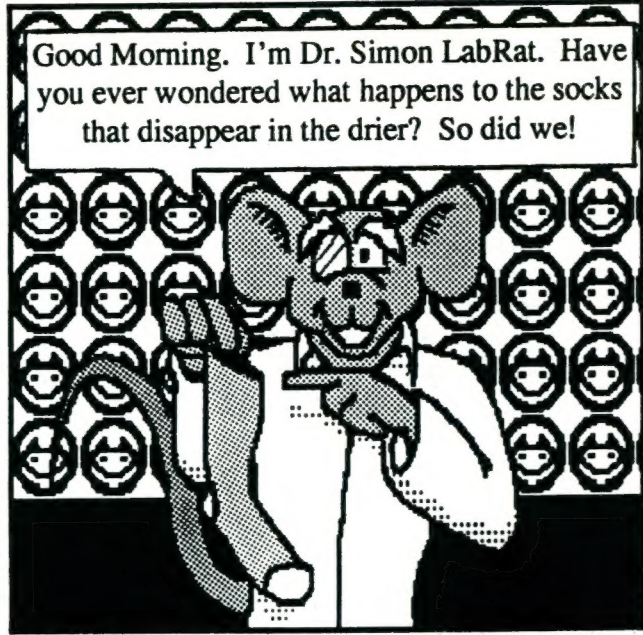
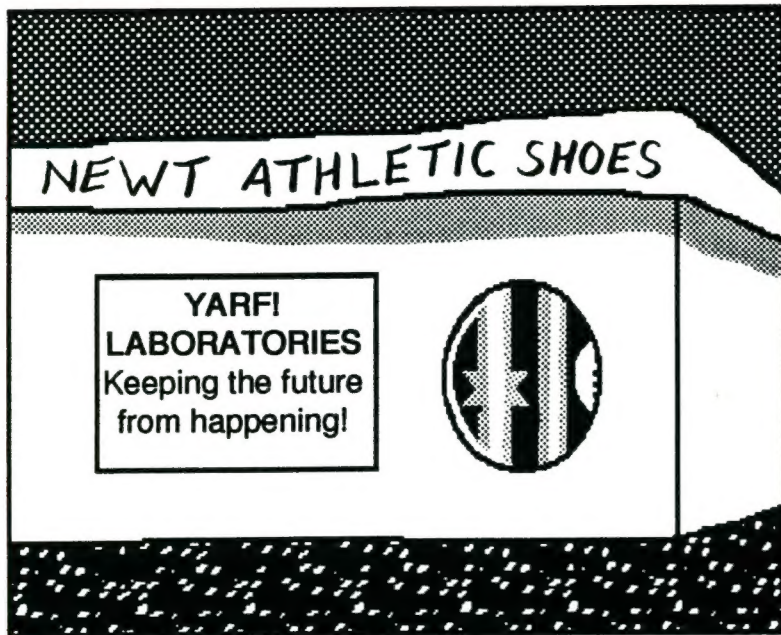
Reviewed by Fred Patten

The Coachman Rat, by David Henry Wilson. New York, Carroll & Graf Publishers, Inc., October 1989, 171 pages, \$13.95. ISBN 0-88184-508-6.

This is the story of the rat that Cinderella's fairy godmother transforms into a human coachman to take her to the Prince's ball, and of what happens after the stroke of midnight. The coachman, Robert, reverts to his rat form but retains his human intelligence and speech. Neither rat nor human, yet both, he struggles to discover where he now fits into the societies of men and of

## Freefall by Mark Stanley





After an extensively financed search by YARFI\*, we have come to one conclusion. Socks don't just disappear. They teleport into a dimension that is normally only accessible to socks, ball point pens, and winning lottery tickets!

*Dr. Simon LabRat*

$E=mc^2$   
 $23+4=93$   
For a good time, call Rolex!

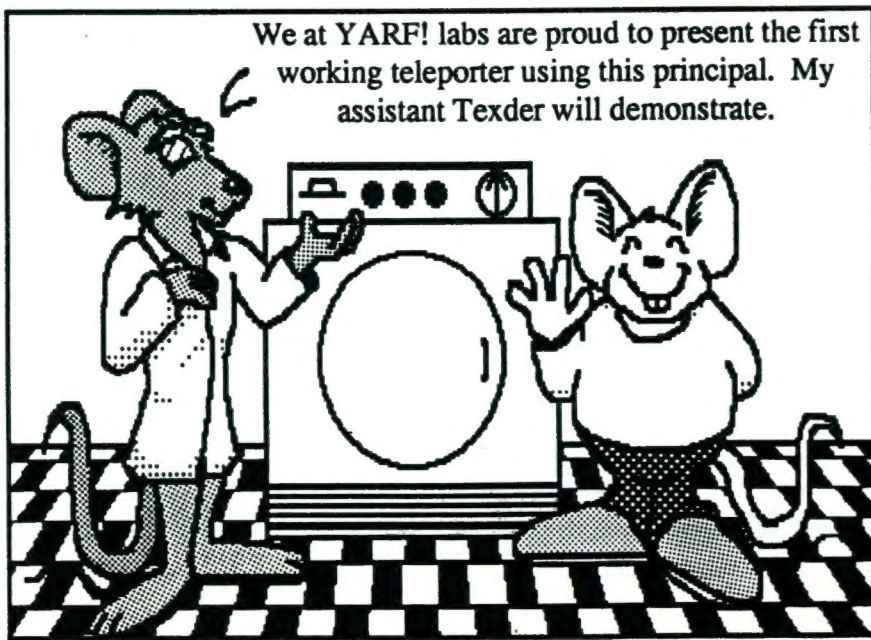
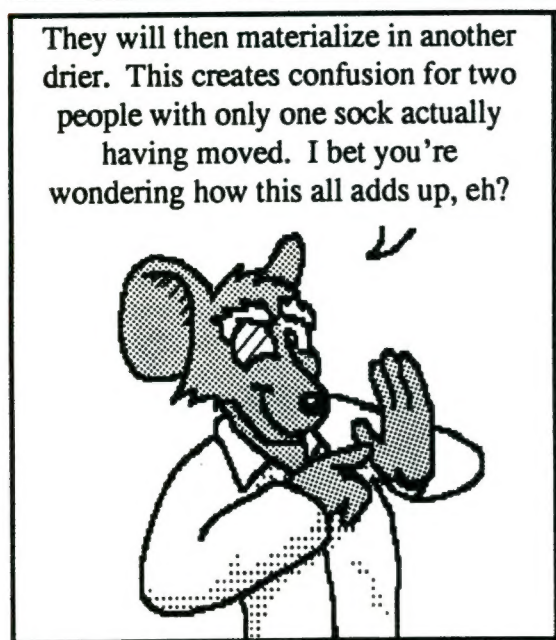
Pick Up Laundry  
 $\sum$  soap  
 $\sum$  water  
Time=Money

Are you really reading this entire blackboard?  
LabRat! Pay your rent or else!  
Jeff

Subscribe to YARFI!  
 $26/3=9$

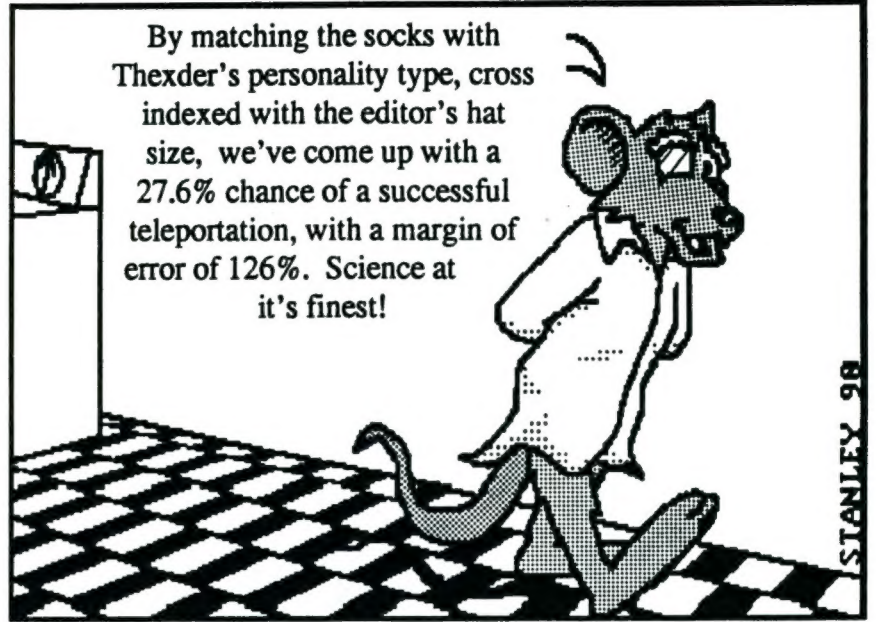
Robert & Katrina Rule!

\*49 cents & one block of Govt. surplus cheese



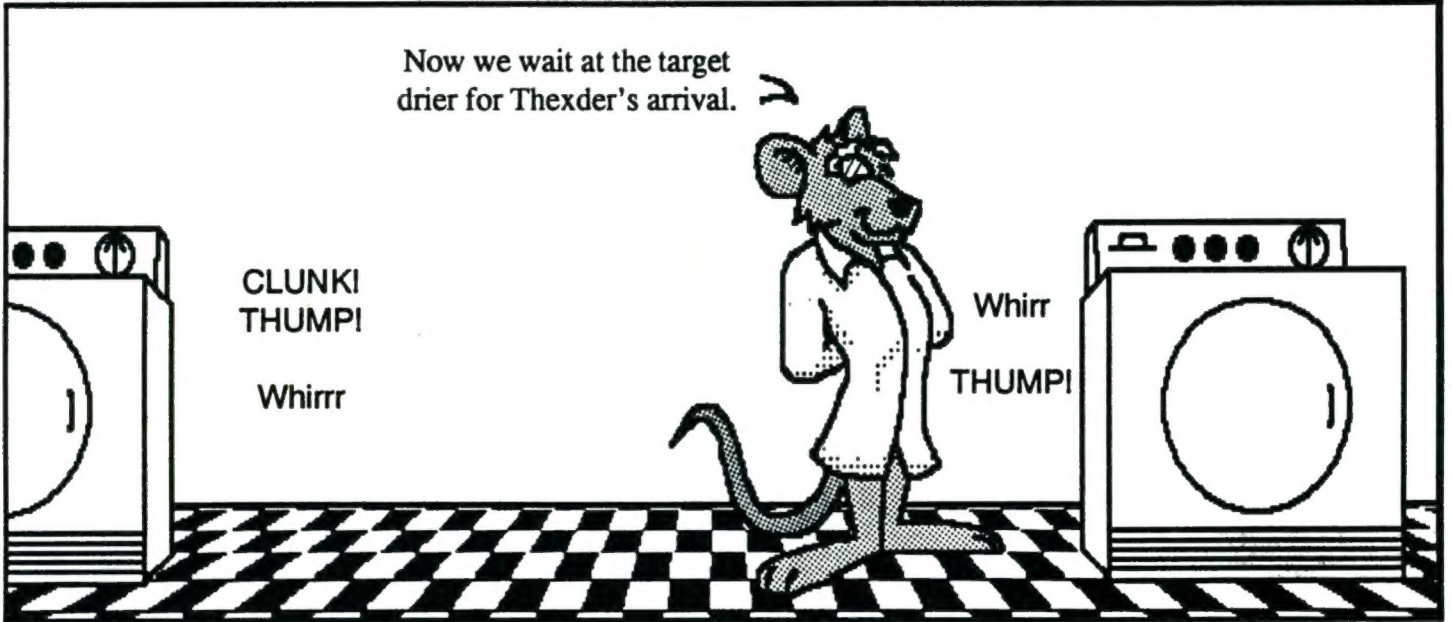


There better not be any flies in here!



By matching the socks with Thexder's personality type, cross indexed with the editor's hat size, we've come up with a 27.6% chance of a successful teleportation, with a margin of error of 126%. Science at it's finest!

STANLEY '98



Now we wait at the target drier for Thexder's arrival.

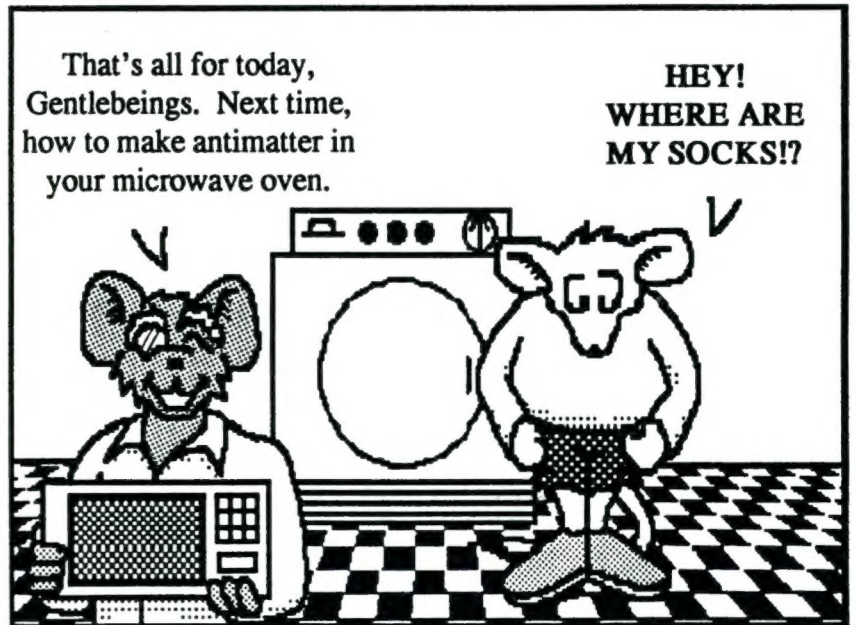
CLUNK!  
THUMPI

Whirrr

Whirr  
THUMPI

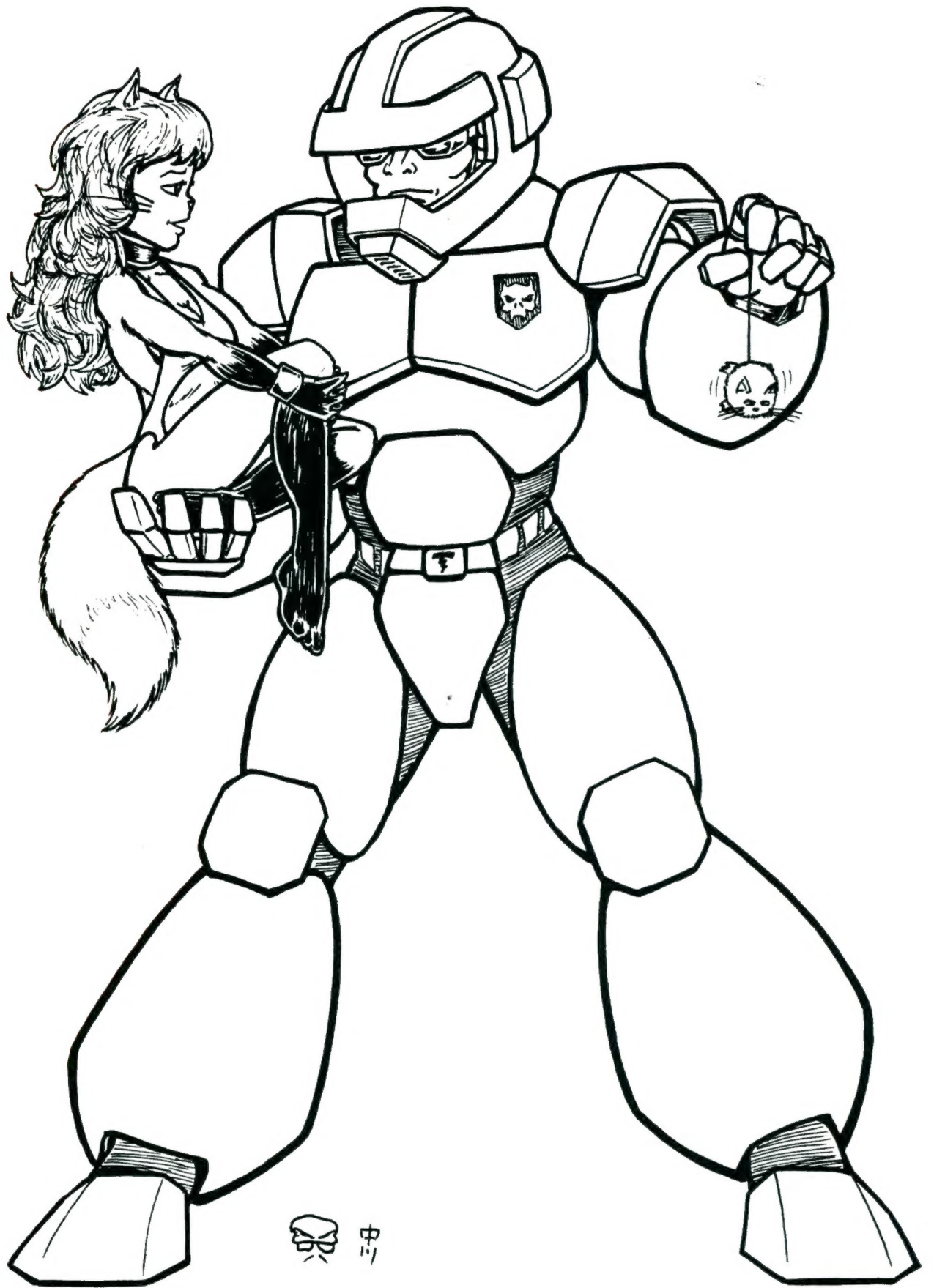


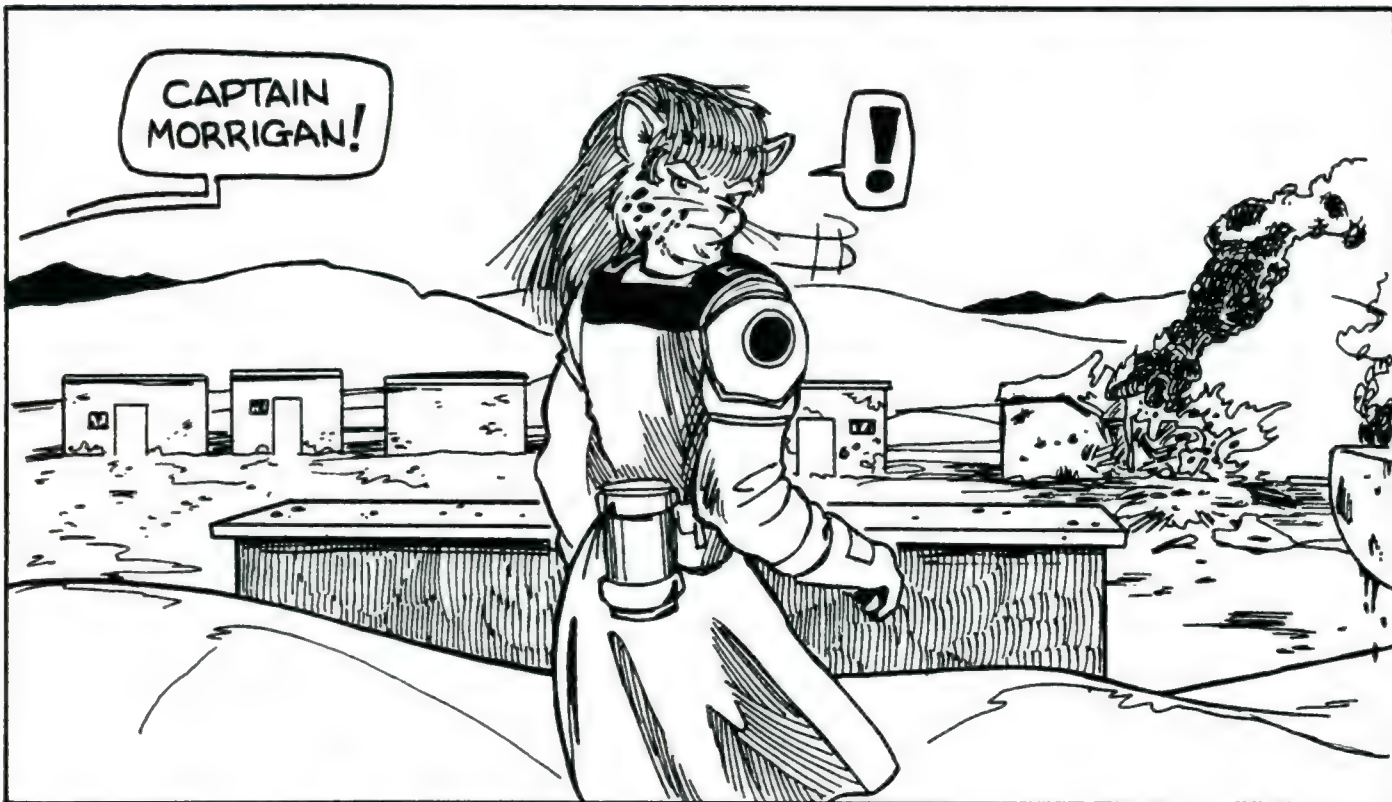
And there he is, safe and sound.



That's all for today, Gentlebeings. Next time, how to make antimatter in your microwave oven.

HEY!  
WHERE ARE MY SOCKS!?





# EMPIRES

STORY, ART, & LAYOUT by CHRIS GRANT

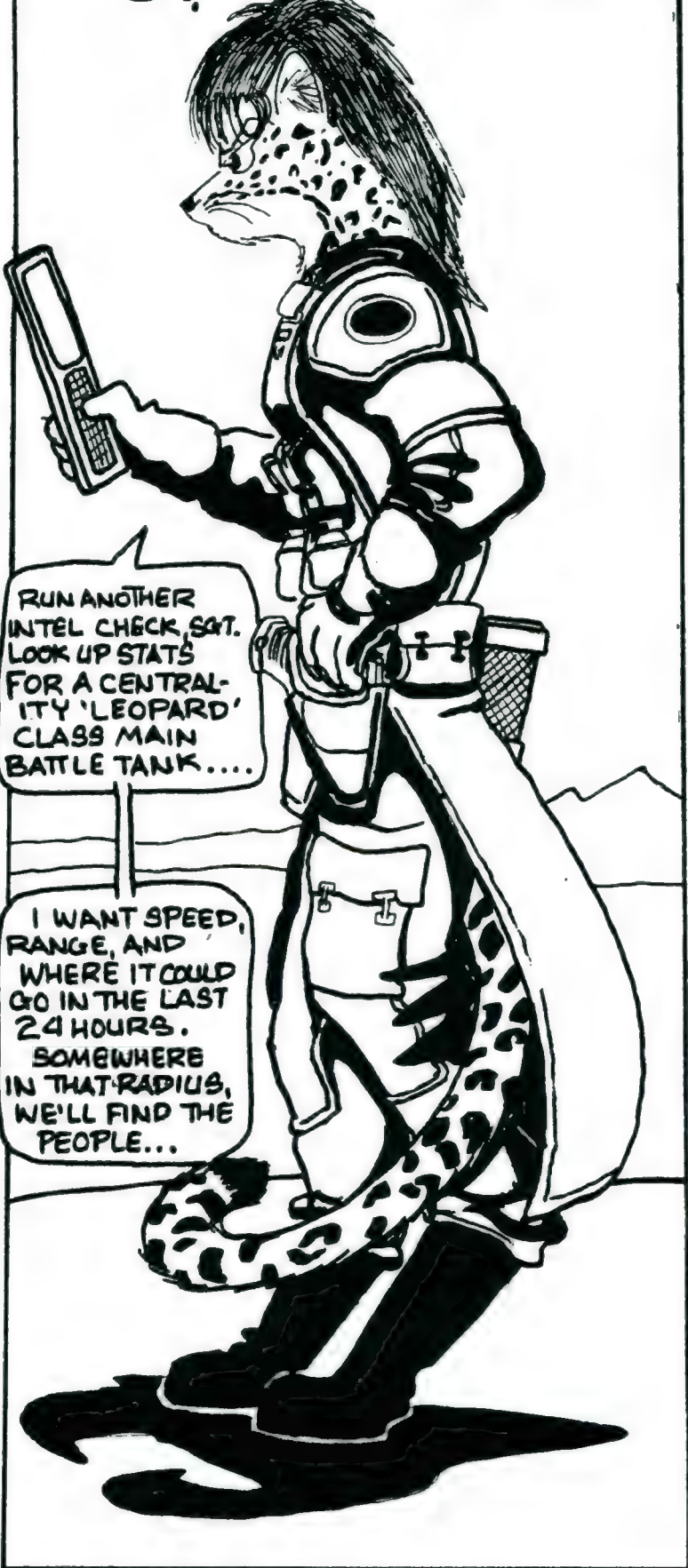
INKS & LETTERING by DAN FLAIVE

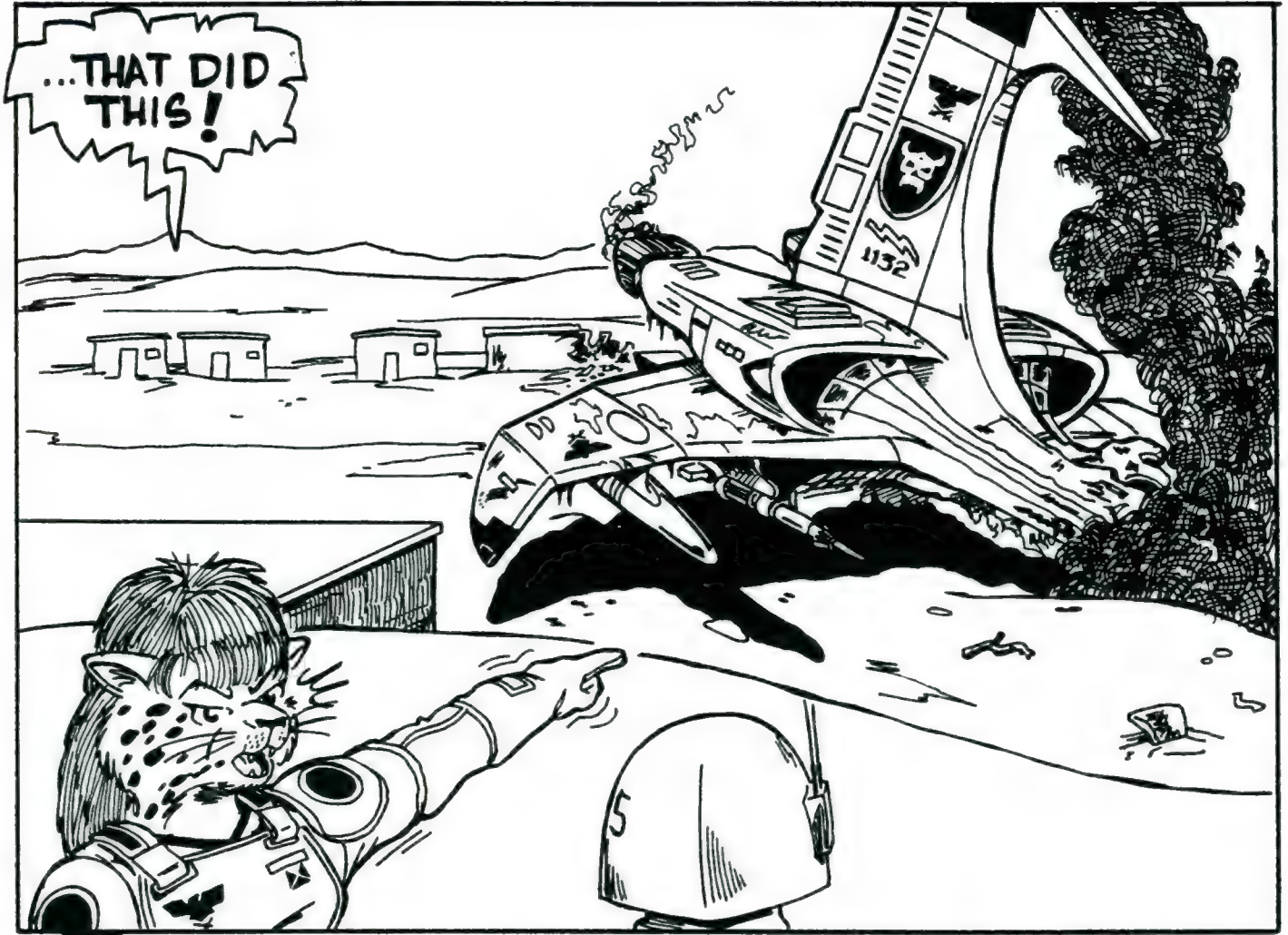


A BUNCH OF STUFF'S MISSING MA'AM  
... HUNNERT MIL-METER ROUNDS ...  
IT'S ALL IN TH' R'PORT

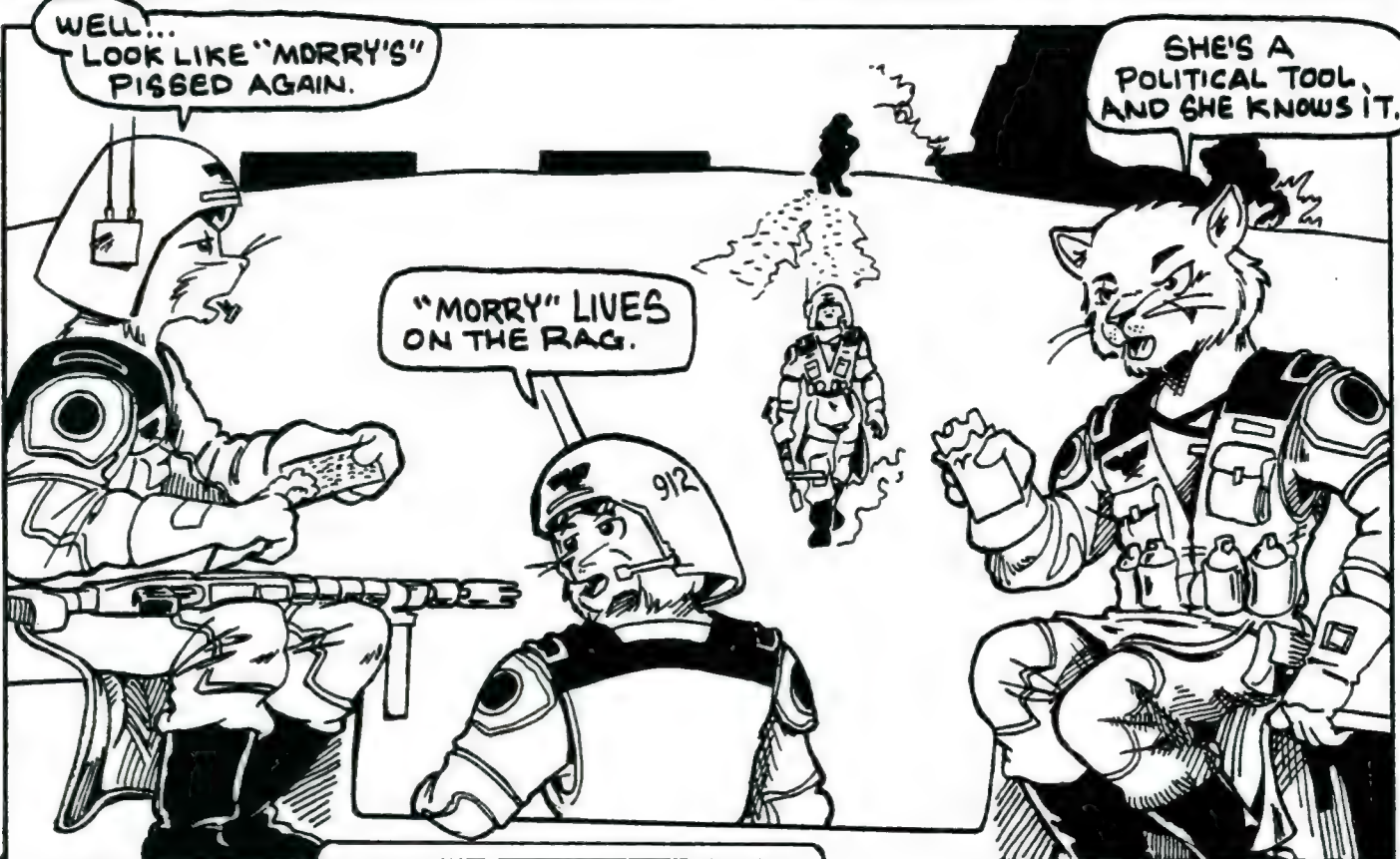


A'KII BATTLEARMOR, ONE SET, MISSING. 100MM  
ELMGG AMMO, IMPERIAL UNIFORMS, 88MM  
ANTI ARMOR ROCKETS ... BLASTER CELLS...





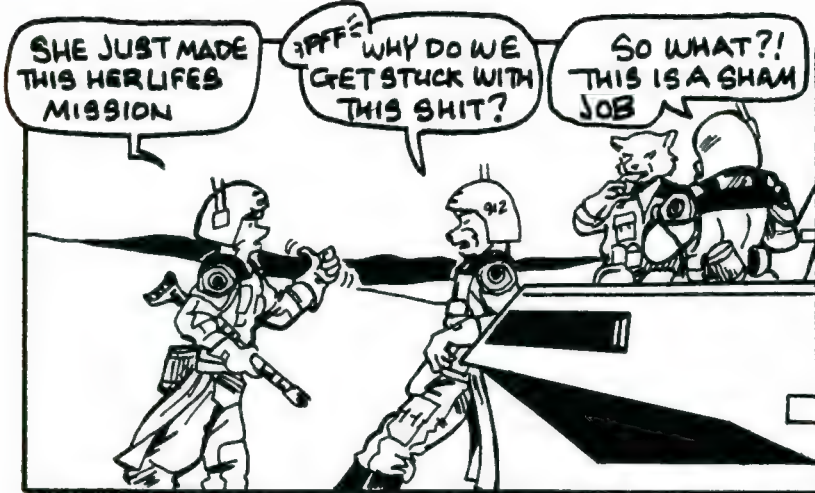
...THAT DID THIS!



WELL...  
LOOK LIKE "MORRY'S"  
PISSED AGAIN.

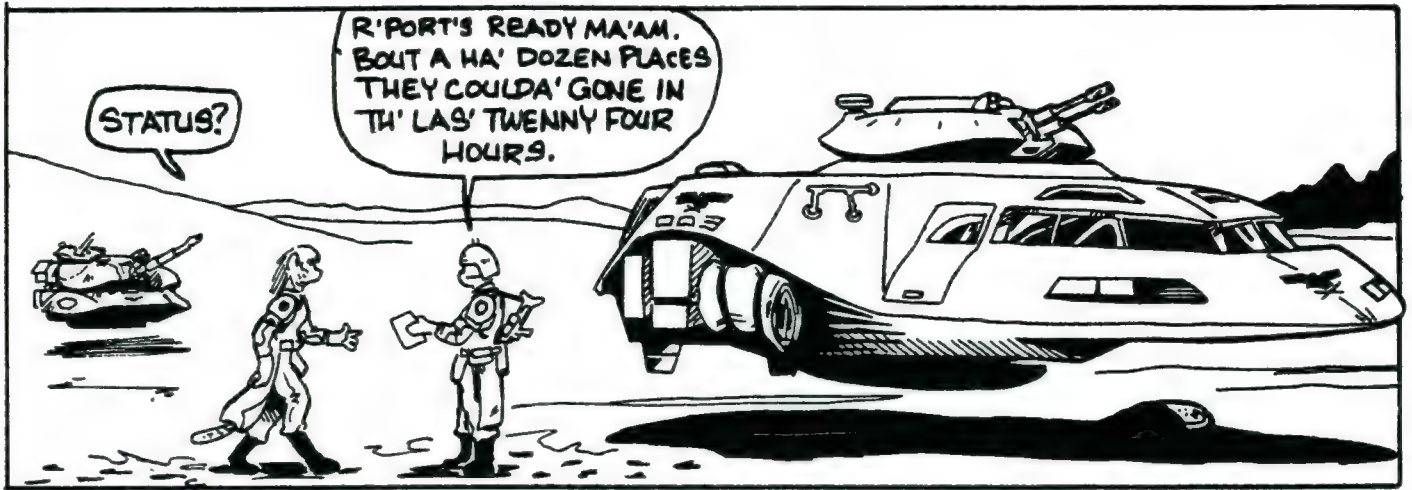
"MORRY" LIVES  
ON THE RAG.

SHE'S A  
POLITICAL TOOL,  
AND SHE KNOWS IT.



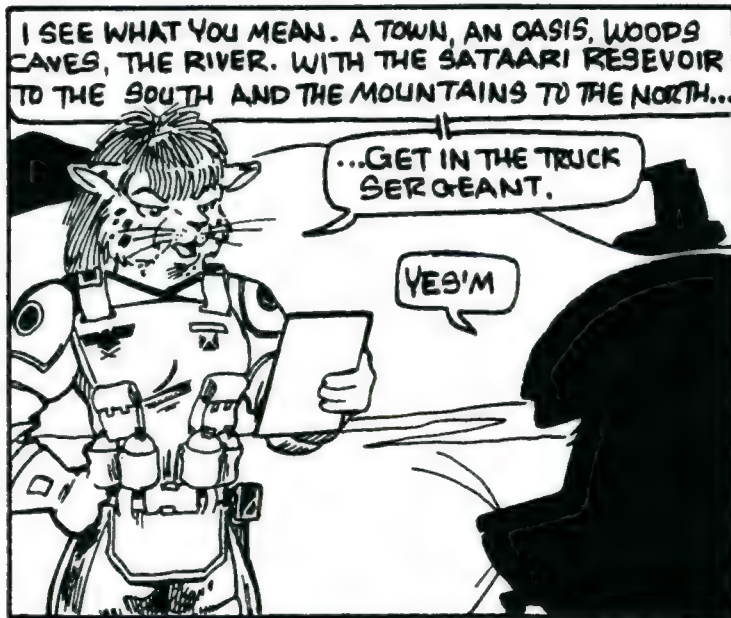
IT'S THE 'SHIT-FER-BRAINS POLITICIANS TRYING TO PROVE WE'RE A NEW, INTERGRATED ARMY! THEY PUT FRINGEWORLDER FEMALES IN CHARGE OF PIDDLY CLEAN UP DETAILS, FAR BEHIND THE LINES! IT'S P.R. AND WE GET TO SUFFER FOR IT!





STATUS?

R'PORT'S READY MA'AM.  
BOUT A HA' DOZEN PLACES  
THEY COULDA' GONE IN  
TH' LAS' TWENNY FOUR  
HOURS.



I SEE WHAT YOU MEAN. A TOWN, AN OASIS, WOODS CAVES, THE RIVER. WITH THE SATAARI RESEVOIR TO THE SOUTH AND THE MOUNTAINS TO THE NORTH...

...GET IN THE TRUCK SERGEANT.

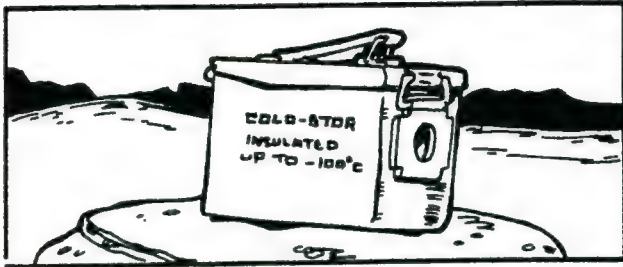
YES'M



A LOT OF LEADS... EACH PLATOON WILL BE TIED UP. BUT WE HAVE TO FLUSH OUT THE ENEMY SURVIVORS BEHIND OUR LINES.



... LOOKS LIKE THE EMPIRE IS SURE TO GET ITS MONYES WORTH OUT OF THIS ONE.



HMM.

YEAH!

!



YA WOULD'A BLOWN HIS GODDAMN HEAD OFF!

IF YER GONNA WASTE A KITTY USE A KITTY'S WEAPON!



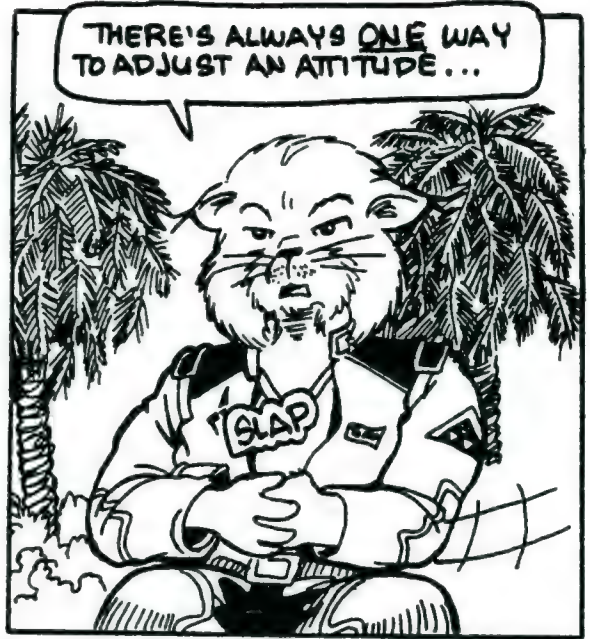


HMM... WE HAVE FOOD AND WATER TO LAST A TWENTY DAY TRIP. FUEL'S NO PROB', WE HAVE ENOUGH FUSION RODS TO LAST MONTH'S



BUT HOW TO RESUPPLY.

THERE'S ALWAYS ONE WAY TO ADJUST AN ATTITUDE...



BEAR IN MIND SIR, THERE ARE PROBABLY OTHER SURVIVORS BESIDES US. THEY MAY BE AT THESE PLACES NOW..



ALSO WONDERING ABOUT SAFE SANCTUARY.

PRIVATE...



DON'T YOU DARE LOWER YOURSELF TO THAT SERGEANT'S LEVEL!

WHAT ARE YOU SUGGESTING SERGEANT SHADDOCK?



YEAH!



SUGGEST WE WAIT. MAYBE 24-48 HOURS .  
THEN MOVE TO HIGH-  
AND HIDE, LIKE  
GIVE THE HEAT  
TIME TO DIE  
DOWN.

ER GROUND  
THE MOUNTAINS.

GOOD POINTS...  
WE'LL STAY HERE  
TONIGHT. SAME  
GUARD SHIFTS...  
AND SEE THE SITUATION  
IN THE MORNING.

PORT I.R.'S FIXED,  
SIR. TOMAC HELPED  
ME.

YOWZER!

GOOD DEAL. ALSO, BE PRE-  
PARED TO STAY HERE TONIGHT,  
MAYBE TOMORROW....

...AFTER ALL, IT LOOKS  
PRETTY CALM HERE...

CONTINUED...



© Zanni '90

## PROLOGUE

I'LL DO IT.

ABSOLUTELY NOT.

HARU-AKE KNELT, MEDITATING, IN THE DREAMERS HALL, A GREAT EMPTY ROOM, LIT BRIGHTLY BY THE SUNLIGHT THAT POURED THROUGH ITS STAINED GLASS WINDOWS. THE PETITE MOUSE ALLOWED THE CONFLICT SHE FELT TO BODIL THROUGH HER, SEEKING TRUTH THROUGH CHAOS.

I LEARNED THIS IN TRUST, SHE THOUGHT. IS IT A BETRAYAL TO DISCLOSE IT? AND WHAT IF I DO NOT DISCLOSE IT?

THIS SHOULD NOT BE SO DIFFICULT, SHE TOLD HERSELF. IT SHOULD BE SHATASK, EFFORTLESS. THE RIGHT PATH WAS ALWAYS THE EASIEST IN THE END. THE ANSWER, SHE KNEW, WOULD BE VERY SIMPLE. IT WAS POSING THE CORRECT QUESTION THAT WOULD BE DIFFICULT.

THE CORRECT QUESTION.

"WHY DID YOU GET INTO THIS?" HE HAD ASKED. THE CORRECT QUESTION. NO ONE HAD EVER BOTHERED TO ASK HER WHY.

"I LIKE TO KILL," SHE HAD ANSWERED. SIMPLE. AND YET NOT SO SIMPLE. "WHAT IS ENERGY," ZEBULON HAD ASKED. THE ANSWER WAS SO SIMPLE.  $E=MC^2$ . YET SO MUCH WAS CONTAINED IN THAT ANSWER.

AKE BECAME AWARE OF ANOTHER ENTERING THE ROOM. SHE DID NOT NEED TO LOOK TO KNOW IT WAS ILLAHNE XING. XING KNELT FACING AKE AND STUDIED HER INTENTLY.

SHE IS VERY NEAR, THOUGHT XING. SHE HAS MASTERED THE VAST POWERS THAT EVERY BEING HAS WITHIN THEM, AND SO RARELY IS ABLE TO USE. SHE HAS BECOME A TEACHER, A COUNSELOR. WILL SHE ACHIEVE SHATASK, SO SOON?

AKE FELT THE RAYS OF THE SUNS REACH HER. THEY GENTLY WARMED HER, SLOWLY MOVING UP HER BODY, SENDING THEIR RADIANCE THROUGH HER EYELIDS. WITHOUT TURMOIL, WITHOUT EFFORT, THE QUESTION FRAMED ITSELF AND STOOD CLEARLY BEFORE HER. IF SHE DID NOT ACT, ALL THIS WOULD BE SWEEP AWAY IN WHAT WAS TO COME. THIS SOLITARY, BEAUTIFUL WORLD, THE ORDER TCHALAHN, THE GENTLE ILLAHNE. ALL GONE.

SHE WOULD NOT ALLOW IT.

THE ANSWER WAS NOT ONLY SIMPLE, IT WAS THE SAME ANSWER SHE HAD FOUND ON THE BATTLEFIELD NOT SO LONG AGO, AN ETERNITY AGO. HER'S WAS THE WARRIOR'S PATH. HER VERY LIFE WAS STRUGGLE AND CONQUEST. AND THE GREATEST CONQUEST WAS THAT OF THE SELF.

AKE OPENED HER EYES AS IF FOR THE FIRST TIME. SHE SEEMED TO SEE DETAILS OF THE ROOM, OF THE WORLD, THAT HAD ESCAPED HER BEFORE. SHE HEARD THE VOICES OF OTHER STUDENTS, DISTANT, CLEAR. THE AIR WAS SWEET, AS OLD AS THE STARS, AS NEW AS BIRTH. IT WAS DONE. IT HAD BEEN EFFORTLESS.

XING LOOKED INTO HER FACE, HER EYES, AND BOWED 'TILL HER HEAD TOUCHED THE FLOOR BEFORE HER PUPIL. ONCE AKE WOULD HAVE BEEN EMBARRASSED, EVEN ALARMED, BY THIS BEHAVIOR. NOW, EVEN ACCEPTANCE WAS EFFORTLESS.

XING AT LAST ROSE AND SPOKE. "HARU-AKE, RARELY HAS A STUDENT ACHIEVED SHATASK SO QUICKLY. I CAN ONLY SURMISE THAT YOU HAVE BEEN SET ON A GREAT TASK, AND WHAT MAY COME OF IT EVEN THE MIGHTY KNOW NOT. I KNOW YOU HAVE FRIENDS THAT AWAIT YOU. GO TO THEM. SHOULD YOU NEED AID OR ASSISTANCE OF ANY OF OUR ORDER AT ANY TIME, YOU HAVE ONLY TO SEND WORD. WE HAVE GONE FAR AFIELD, INTO THE CSP AND FAR INTO THE FRONTIER. GO AND FIND TRUTH. GO.

# The Star

by David White

It wasn't just Shiryo. You could find an amorphous gathering of sentients on any of the twelve inhabited moons of the giant failed star Iroko. Each world retained their sovereignty and were only bound by their accords with each other. The markets were now coming back to their pre-war strength as trade barriers went down. Iroko gave you billions of Ryo to sell to and all the Ryo industry to buy from, all in one place. You could shift orbits between any two moons in a couple of days. And the Ryo were very adept at stellar trade, since they had been trading between the twelve worlds for over a century. They had become the major hub of out-world trade, not to mention a source of people. People who had a tremendous desire to see new worlds. The demand attracted the biggest freight and passenger liners as well as the smallest of the freetraders.

Lake Craft City could brag of its many fine dining establishments to host the endless stream of visitors. But none could boast a menu or history quite like Rude's. In the early days of interstellar trade when Shiryo welcomed the first of many off-worlders, some of the strict carnivores, in search of a good fresh meal and drawn by a delicious aroma, discovered Rude's Bait & Tackle shop. Old Charlie Rude, a squirrel who was not one to turn down good money, accommodated them. Four generations later it was the favored restaurant for visiting and resident seafood lovers. And if you went out behind the restaurant, you could still find the tiny tackle shop, near the water.

Pearl eagerly took in the large dining room and its variety of guests. The patter of a dozen distinct accents and a few birth languages danced on her ears. She had never seen such a diversity of Furkind in one place since taking Verge as her mate, and she was intrigued by a world whose inhabitants all smelled like food. Verge smiled as his tiger craned her neck to see around the room. His own first trip to Iroko, piloting a cramped cargo ship, had not been so long ago.

"Order anything you like, my love," said her lion-mate gallantly. He paused a moment to check their sleeping baby daughter and tuck her into her carrier. "With cash in hand for an on-time delivery and another cargo ready to load, we are sitting pretty. We've earned a night off."

Their waiter, a flesh and blood waiter, took their orders and departed. Pearl smiled a tiger smile and pulled herself

away from the excitement. "Verge, this is great! It's such a party! It's the kind of species mixing the CSP is so proud of. I'm just surprised that all the Ryo moved here," said Pearl. "Most species prefer their own territory, the more the better." "They didn't move here," Verge said. "Iroko's moons are the homes of all the Ryo."

"This many species grew in this one place? I'll bet they have an interesting theory to account for that."

"There are as many theories as Ryo. What's strange is that the next world sunward is also inhabitable, but has no native inhabitants."

"I remember from the navigation charts," she said. "Serenity is closed to all non-Ryo and vessels carrying non-Ryo. No such vessel shall approach or attempt to land under any circumstances. Violators are subject to arrest and severe penalty," she quoted carefully. Pearl served as their lifeship's navigator and their lives sometimes depended on a clear reading of the charts. "Why do they put it that way. Non-Ryo, I mean. And what kind of penalties? And why?"

Leave it to Pearl to ask three questions in one breath. Such kittenish habits were one reason why Verge loved her so. "Not all rodents are regarded as Ryo, only Irokan citizens. As for Serenity, The Ryo closed the whole planet to outsiders just after their first contact with the CSP and they won't say why, even to close personal friends. I do know that they're serious about keeping it closed. The Air Service and Field Militia are on patrol constantly on and around the planet. Just approaching Serenity can get your ship confiscated, and actually landing can get your next of kin asked where they want the bodies sent. Then again, some people have landed and only been fined. Even the trials and records are closed, to keep their secrets."

"Do you suppose our waiter would know?"

"Pearl, don't even think of asking!" Verge said urgently, "There are some things that the Ryo consider mortal insults, and they are a vengeful race. Questions about Serenity seem to be one of those dangerous subjects."

"All right, don't concern yourself so. I'll behave." She leaned over and kissed him lightly on the nose. "I'm going

to the ladies room. Be right back," she said.

Pearl went only as far as the washbasins and took a common cold remedy with a drink of water, then paused at the mirror on her way back to the table. She brushed her facial fur and gently shook out her hair, determined to have an enjoyable evening even if she did feel out of sorts.

She shot out the door and collided with someone just past the threshold. She stumbled back, off balance, and sat down hard on the last two inches of her own tail, emitting a sharp yelp as she did.

"I'm very sorry," said the man she had hurtled into, offering her his hand. "Are you all right?" Pearl first extended her hand, and only then looked up into the midnight black eyes of a Volan.

In the years since contact had been established between the Combined Species Pact and the Irokan Concordat, the Volan had acquired a sinister reputation, much of it undeserved. The stories from Pearl's not-so-distant childhood rushed back upon her. The Volan. Creatures of mystic, even demonic, origin; beasts who preyed on sentients; drinkers of blood; consumers of souls...

Almost reflexively, she shrank back from the offered hand. Then she shook her head slightly and let her breathing begin again. This was no monster. Just another race unfamiliar to her. The Volan were species Sasabish, descended from this world's flesh eating flying squirrels. His fur was a soft gray tinged with a bit of light brown. He wore the uniform of a ranking military officer, deep blue and silver, with rows of decorations and the hornet wings of a combat pilot. To his credit, he had not drawn back when she had recoiled from him, but just stood with his hand outstretched and a gentle smile, waiting for her to accept his aid.

Verge hurried around the corner in response to the sound of his mate's distress just in time to see the stranger help her to her feet.

"Are you all right?" Verge asked as he slid his arm around Pearl.

"Yes. It was my fault. I wasn't watching where I was going," she responded, rubbing the end of her tail gingerly.

"Thank you for your help," said Verge to the officer.

"Not at all," he answered. "Forgive me for disturbing your evening." Then he made a slight bow to Pearl and headed for the bar.

Verge waited until they were seated in their booth before expressing his concern.

"Are you sure you're all right? You were trembling all the way back here. What happened?"

"Yes, I'm OK. It's just that...well, he was a, is it pronounced 'zha-zha-beaks'?"

"Saw-sha-bees," he replied. "I think. Just call them Volan. They prefer that to all the mispronunciations, and it's just as correct."

"Anyway," Pearl continued, her voice still reflecting her fright, "I all but ran over this man, and landed on my tail, and that hurt, and then here's this Volan staring at me with those eyes of his..." a shudder ran through her from fingertips to tailtip. "...so OF COURSE I'm a little shaky."

"Pearl! You don't believe all that nonsense about the Volan, do you? Those are stories children tell to scare each other in the dark."

"What am I supposed to believe when I've never seen them for myself?" she quavered.

Verge nodded sheepishly. He sometimes forgot that his mate had not travelled as extensively as he had. Strangely, it was the words of the Ryo philosopher Flannigan that he recalled. "Another person's ignorance is YOUR fault!" And without knowledge, what did you have to shape your view of the world but superstition?

"Well, I've heard the stories, too, and I've been around Shiryo enough to tell you that almost all of them are bunk. The Volan do not practice cabalistic rites, indulge in demon worship, or consume the flesh of living sentients. Whether or not they secretly control Irokan political affairs is anyone's guess. They are certainly influential all out of proportion to their numbers."

"There's Serenity. I thought no one knew what they do there?"

"That's true," he admitted.

"Then they could be doing *anything* there," she whispered.

"Love, the Volan are no different from any other people," he said reassuringly, "they are just intensely secretive about some things. And you'd expect that of rodents."

Pearl let the subject pass as their waiter approached.

"With the compliments of the gentleman you were rather roughly introduced to," he said, and offered a wine bottle which bore just a trace of dust and was sealed with natural cork.

"Lindenbrett wine!" said Verge admiringly. "Excellent and verrry expensive. Please, sir, do you know that officer's

name?"

The waiter beamed with pride and answered, "Most everyone hereabouts knows him. He's sort of our hometown hero. That's Colonel Marc Palti."

"THAT was Palti!" Verge exclaimed, half rising from his seat. If he had been in view, Verge would have run off in pursuit.

"How do you know him?" asked Pearl.

"He was one of the highest scoring pilots in the Tatana Conflict," Verge answered, settling again in his seat, his quarry unseen. "His text on in-atmosphere maneuvering and combat is required reading at all the flight academies. I wonder why he's here in dress uniform?"

The waiter responded, "He and his wartime squadron are having their reunion here. They hold one every year, and this year it is our honor to host them." The waiter gave them a toothy smile (could a rodent do otherwise?) as he extracted the bottle's cork. "You may yet meet him, sir, after their dinner. After all, you have, in a fashion, already been introduced."

Marc Palti posted himself near the door to the private dining room just behind Rude's bar and watched as his friends began to arrive. As they entered he waved them toward the room and greeted them. It seemed they hadn't changed that much. Had it really been ten years?

"Sweat glands!"

"Doesn't prove a thing."

"Why would a fur bearing creature have sweat glands?" said Haley Favour with the added emphasis of his expressive hands.

"Heat dissipation. We're a lot larger than our progenitors. We can't keep cool by panting, you know."

"Then why have fur? We should have lost it when we developed sweat glands, if we DID evolve!"

"We needed the fur to stay warm in DeepWinter before anyone invented clothing, or do you think clothing evolved too?" answered Donnaly Bowen in his easy, measured tone.

Marc marveled as the first of his friends arrived. It couldn't have been ten years. They were arguing this during the war. Haley (of the *Tamias*, the chipmunks) had become a popular screen and novel writer, while Donnaly (of the *Fosser*, the branch of that race that were sometimes called prairie dogs) had worked his way to the Concordat general prosecutors office, and was supposedly in line for a judicial

appointment. Not that anyone would guess it from their conversation. They still sounded like a couple of sprogs.

"So why hasn't anyone found any fossil evidence of *evolving* furkind?" said Haley sharply.

"No one's looked in the right place. Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence." Donnaly replied.

Evolution versus creation, Marc thought wryly. Good thing no one placed as much importance on where we had come from as on where we were going. No one had ever had fought a war over religion, but someone may want to be first. Naaaaw. That was TOO crazy.

That was when Marc saw the rat. Not just any rat, but a tall, shapely, big-busted, white furred, blond haired rat who might have ridden out of one of the thunderous Norge operas.

Ingrid Lytle threw Marc a smile and a cool but friendly glance to Haley. Ingrid had shot up the corporate ladder in one of the Norge conglomerates, remarkable for a woman of that male dominated world. Marc had heard that, as president of out system sales, she had cut a swath through both the boardrooms and bedrooms of the CSP. Away from her home world she was not regarded as a threat or oddball, but as an exotic beauty.

Marc broke into a grin as the next man entered. Emile Ransom was a Volan like Marc, a bit taller and darker of fur and decidedly crazier. He waved a floppy blue saddle hat at Marc with a regal flourish and wore a photographer's jacket that must have weighed twelve pounds. Ever the journalist, he was always ready for an unexpected shot. He hadn't changed since the war.

The last of the guests HAD changed. Considerably. One of Shiryo's *Asida* gray squirrels, Pete Varso had been the 27th's squadron commander, and he'd been perpetually uptight. Now, as an executive with an insurance company, he could express his natural good cheer. He bounded through the bar towards Marc with a big smile and an outstretched hand, his bushy tail flowing behind like a jet's vapor trail. Now Marc was the one in charge, and he felt the weight of command.

"Hiya, Marc," said Pete with a strong handshake. "I saw the others. Did Ake show up?"

"No sign of her," Marc answered. "Looks like she's going to miss again this year. Guess that's the disciplined life for you. Let's go in."

Marc's mate waited for him just inside the door. Ingrid may have caught Marc's attention, but Chrystal's smile almost stalled his ticker. A red furred *Ajidamo* squirrel, Chrys had given him four children and a decade of love

and she still made his tail twitch. No one ever questioned her presence at what was supposed to be a squadron-only function, where other mates and friends were excluded. She had been an intelligence officer during the war at their base, they had served together, and that seemed to explain everything.

Dinner passed in the pleasant conversation of friends who had not seen each other in a year. The meal concluded and the table cleared, they all fell silent as a small decanter was passed around the table and glasses were filled. Haley produced a small hand-held instrument from a pocket of his brush jacket and slowly pointed it around the room. Haley's jacket, filled with devices and ordnance, weighed two pounds more than Emile's vest. A few moments, and he gave an all clear sign. No listening devices present. And it was Marc, not Pete, who had them stand and raise their glasses in the Loyal Toast.

"In the service of our people, we stand," they said in unison. Another annual meeting of the Back Room Squadron had begun.

Marc remained standing as the others took their seats and began.

"I think we'll have a fairly brief meeting tonight. I have received the advance information from the DeepRanger probe. They found the home world of the New People."

A pleased rumble came from the assemblage. This was news they'd been waiting for.

"The news is appallingly good." Marc continued. "You'll find hard copy briefings in front of you. The people call themselves human beings, or simply humans. The planet is called Earth. And they are definitely not looking for a lost spaceship."

"Marc that's crazy," said Haley. "We all saw the video of their reconnaissance ship. Nothing but a search for a lost ship fits their actions."

"Too true, Haley," Marc said. "But we also could not know everything. We know of only one search craft that took off the moment it was discovered. They may have recovered their people. Or they may have determined that they were dead. In any event, it's clear that they have no search under way."

"But Marc, what about all the sightings? The reports of contacts with what have to be humans?" asked Ingrid.

"I'm sure at least some of them are true. The humans are beginning to explore in our direction. But no rescue missions are under way. Despite the rumors of exotic slaves, unfurred aliens, or whatever, there is no threat to the Ryo from these people at this time. Therefore, I'm

calling an end to this project."

There was an uncomfortable shuffle. Clearly, no one wanted this. Marc voiced their concerns.

"I know we still have leads and a lot of curious goings-on. I also know that a lot of the snooping we've done has been in violation of the law, though from the highest motives. I can't allow you to endanger your futures when the best evidence shows that there is no danger, and nothing to find.

"I do offer my heartfelt thanks to all of you for all your efforts and sacrifices over the last ten years. But it's time to call it quits."

The group quietly followed Marc and Chrys from the room, and were quickly stopped by a knot of people near the entrance. Someone was in trouble, and no one seemed to know what to do. Marc led the group toward the commotion.

Verge cradled Pearl on one arm, the baby in the other, and felt like screaming. Pearl had finally admitted that she wasn't well, and they had almost made it to the door when she collapsed. Verge knew that if he took her back to their lifeship, and her illness was something the autodoc couldn't cope with, he would lose precious time he'd need finding help. But did the Ryo have the hospital facilities to handle even a simple feline illness? And what about Leeri? Meantime the rodents stood by, unsure if help was wanted, uncertain how to help.

"GANGWAY! Comin' through!"

Emile's clear tenor got the crowd's attention, and the authority of Marc's uniform cleared the way. Chrys had the most knowledge of off system physiology, and quickly made an evaluation. The tiger was young and showed no sign of injury through her silver/orange fur. But her pulse raced, her breathing was labored and wheezing, and a touch to her nose indicated an alarmingly high temperature.

"It could be Ryme's fever," she said. "Did it hit her suddenly?"

"Yes," Verge answered, distraught. The lion shook his dark mane-like hair in helpless frustration. "She was fine earlier tonight. She walked this far and just fell."

"Don't worry yourself," Marc told him reassuringly. He had noticed the spacers guild patch on Verge's jacket. "We pilot's stick together when there's trouble."

Chrys peered into Pearl's dilated eye. "Damn. Could be any of the choric viruses. If I.. could..." her voice trailed off as her hand went to a small pin on Pearl's jacket.

Chrystal looked like an owl's talons had seized her heart. She turned to Marc, and her fear only deepened. Marc's face had become hard, expressionless. A mask. He had seen the pin also, and Chrys was afraid of the decision she knew he had already made.

"Marc, she needs a hospital," Chrys whispered desperately.

"No," said Marc firmly. "We'll take them home."

• • •

It seemed to Pearl that her nose woke up first. The room smelled of great age, fresh linen, stone, antique wood, and from somewhere came the faint aroma of baking bread. She opened her eyes, squinting against the midmorning sunlight from the window. She wasn't on the ship. The stone wall curved like part of a cylinder and the walls were hung with tapestries and painted in restful dark green; the furnishings were of dark, carved hardwood and very old; and someone had dressed her in a sturdy woolen nightgown. Someone who didn't know that she always slept in her fur. She knew she'd been very sick, that some amount of time had passed, and the scents told her that Verge had been in the room recently. She wrapped herself in a thick robe that had been left at the foot of the bed but ignored the slippers in favor of the surer grip of her own feet. Behind the door was an ornate drawing room, also decorated in greens. Beyond that was the hallway.

Pearl tried to follow Verge's scent, but it was lost in dozens of others. Rodent scents. The corridor lead her to a wide staircase that descended to a large chamber that looked like an updated version of a castle's great hall, which indeed it was. She gripped the bannister tightly as she started cautiously down the stairs. At that same moment a female squirrel entered the chamber. Dressed in denim pants and a spotless white shirt, her bright red hair bounced along with the same rhythm as her equally red tail. The squirrel saw Pearl and rushed up the stairs.

"I knew it! I knew the moment we left you alone you'd be up and wandering about. You go straight back to bed," the squirrel said.

Pearl wanted to struggle, but the exertion of walking even this short distance had exhausted her. The squirrel stepped under Pearl's arm, taking her weight, and turned her back up the stairs. Pearl could only go along.

"Please, where's Verge? Where is my cub?" Pearl asked softly.

"Leeri is with my daughter's nurse. Your mate is in the apartment next to yours." she answered. "He's been by your side for the last three days. We had to carry him out

early this morning."

"I know I've been ill, but this isn't a hospital. Is it?"

The squirrel smiled. "Honeyman Station has been many things, including a hospital. But it is currently our home. I'm Chrystal Santheweja, Marc Palti's mate. I understand you 'met' Marc at the hotel." An expression of understanding crossed Pearl's face. Chrystal continued, "You fainted in the lobby. Felderis' virus. We brought you here and had a specialist flown out from the capital. I understand you weren't in serious danger."

Pearl knew better. Their lifeship's autodoc couldn't have managed anything as rare and unpredictable as one of the Felderis' viruses without outside help. And by the time Verge found the right help on an unfamiliar planet, she'd have been dead or brain damaged.

Chrys opened a door near the staircase. Inside Verge lay in a bed in an opulent room done all in blue. Though sound asleep, his face looked worried and careworn. Pearl wanted to go to him, to hold him and be held. The fear that she might still be contagious made her settle for a view from a distance.

Chrys closed the door and helped her patient down the hall. "It must be an interesting life in the freetrade. Going all over the skies, seeing all the different people and their worlds. I rarely get to travel. Tell me something about what you've seen."

• • •

The craft seemed to be almost within arm's reach, just visible in the night sky. Blazing light revealed every detail as a battlefield flare burst somewhere ahead. The pilot's hand swept the night vision goggles up on his helmet, then he looked directly into the camera lens. His face was furless, muzzleless, pink as shaved skin, and wearing an expression that was a mixture of shock and rage. The picture froze.

"There can't be any mistake," said Haley.

"Don't trush things," replied Ingrid pointedly. "We haven't eliminated other possible explanations."

"I'm afraid he's right. It's a perfect match," said Emile as he held up a small enamel pin. Pearl's pin was a gold rimmed black disc. On the disc was a five pointed star, every point a different color of white, blue, yellow, green, red. It was identical to the insignia of the craft on the screen. A craft that Marc had sighted and photographed during the war with the Vul. A craft that had been searching for a lost spacecraft. A craft that should have gone for reinforcements a decade ago.

"The proportions, even the color values are exact," Emile went on, turning the pin over. "There's something stamped here. Made in...Taiwan?"

Marc looked up from a computer terminal. "That's one of the Earth's constituent nations. I checked."

"Then our first mission objective has been achieved," Emile said. "They're alive, somewhere."

Marc returned to his console and called for a new screen as several of the others worked at similar stations. The room they worked in was one of many that made up the command center of Obturas, the Palti family shelter and stronghold. Built beneath the ancient fortress island at the edge of Lake Craft, Obturas had given generations of Paltis the peace of mind that only came to the Ryo when they knew that they had, at last resort, a safe place to hide.

Chrystal came in and pulled a chair up to Marc's console. "I'm afraid I haven't had much luck," she said dejectedly. "The only cargo they've had out of the ordinary stuff was a 'no-questions-asked' job late last year with one or two people involved. She got the pin from one of the passengers. She became very anxious when I asked about the passenger that gave it to her, but she did admit that one of them was a Vul. She wouldn't say outright, but from the descriptions of what her and Verge did and saw, I'd say they took the job from the L'reow system."

"Does she know the significance of this insignia?" Emile asked.

"No, not at all," Chrys replied. "She thinks it's just a unique decorative item."

"That's enough for a start," said Donnaly. "Our Criminal Information Network has customs information, and it's updated every time a ship with a mail packet comes in." Donnaly logged on with an authorization that did not connect to a living person and quickly described what he was looking for. Just as quickly came the response. "Yep. Here it is. Out of L'reow, destination NewHome, no registered cargo or passengers."

"Flash that over here, Donnaly," called Pete from his own terminal. In a few moments he was comparing two screens. "That's interesting. Their insurance manifest shows them departing L'reow with two passengers and one 'E' type conpak freight container. How big would that be?"

"Eighty cubic feet. About four by four feet and five feet high," responded Ingrid. "We ship small instruments in 'E' types all the time, but they're not too common generally. Too small for bulk cargo."

"I've got something," Donnaly called. "The liner *Lyle Swan* delivered one 'E' type container and a Vul named VaHeth

to L'rannor City transfer point."

"Flash that here, too," Pete called. Then, "I'll be damned. He left on Verge and Pearl's lifeship nine hours later with the same crate."

"Maybe they unloaded and repacked the same container with a different cargo," said Chrys.

"No," said Pete, "the weights are exactly the same. It's the same cargo."

Haley joined Pete, looking over his shoulder. "Maybe the delivery was rejected for some reason."

"That doesn't fit," said Emile as he put all the information on the large briefing screen at once. "He'd just take it back aboard the *Swan*." He pondered it a moment, trying to think like a Vul. "I'll bet he delivered it, then stole it back. Fits with the 'no questions' charter of Verge's ship." He turned to Chrys. "Couldn't you get anything else from them?"

"I'm surprised I got as much as I did," she replied. "Normally, a freetrader won't even discuss a 'no questions' contract. They run those ships like a family farm, just barely getting by from one manifest to the next. Violating any agreement means death by starvation. No cargo broker would trust them with a shipment again. I used a little psychological leverage on them, but they'll get suspicious and clam up if I get too nosey."

"I doubt we'll find out who the Vul delivered to, either," said Marc. "If you send a courier, it's so you don't have to stencil an address on your package. He's the only link to where it was going, and what was in it."

"Ahhhhhh!" said Emile. "I was checking the news service dispatches for that day. There's one here about a Leoni yacht and a Drak scout ship exchanging fire. The scout was destroyed. It also mentions that a nearby lifeship making a jump was not damaged. Guess whose lifeship?"

"This is beginning to stink," Marc said heatedly. "Couriers, sealed cargo, combat with the Drak, 'no questions asked'. It's starting to smell like a CSP intelligence operation. Donnaly, if they went to NewHome, they had to go through Varananth Station to clear customs. Can you check that?"

"Just a sec," said Donnaly. His terminal purred and clucked contentedly for a few moments before giving up the data. "Here it is. Conpak and two passengers disembarked. VaHeth and a Thari giving the name B. Puma."

That brought a grin from all concerned. Puma was the Thari equivalent of Smith.

"I'll bet the Vul switches identities," said Marc, "but with that name the Thari may be a rush job. An escort or some such. See if you can catch him leaving the station."

"Already did," he replied, "B. Puma departed for NewHome in the company of one Jethric VaDell."

Everything stopped at the mention of the name. Even the terminals seemed determined to keep a respectful silence. Marc flashed the page onto his own screen. "I can check him out through our intelligence files," Marc said. "He may in fact be an ordinary courier, in which case..." he fell silent again and stared intently at the name.

"Don't let it get to you, Marc," said Ingrid gently. "I've been to NewHome. There are thousands of Vul named VaDell."

"Yeah, I know," Marc said thoughtfully. "But wouldn't it be something..."

• • •

Marc sat in the upstairs library, finished reviewing the information they'd gleaned for the fourth time and rubbed his eyes. There wasn't much to go on. A low level courier named VaDell. A Thari. A box just big enough to hold a small life support unit and a single sentient. A human? There was no way to tell. They couldn't even be sure how many people were involved. Two? Three? Could the Thari have been in the crate? Why would VaDell steal his own consignment *after* delivering it, then smuggle it back to NewHome? Double cross? By Franchot's implacable shade, there were just too many damned questions, and no answers.

The call signal chirped softly from Marc's terminal. The voice of the downstairs maid came on.

"Sir, Mademoiselle Haru-Ake has arrived. Shall I show her to quarters or..."

"No! Please take her to the west study," Marc said quickly. "And have Chrystal and the other guests meet me there, except Verge and Pearl."

Marc didn't wait for the inevitable "As you wish," and was off at a dead run. He tore down the hall from the library and down the stairs, at last skidding into the study. Ake turned from the bookcase and came to him. She was dressed in ordinary casual clothes instead of the robes of an acolyte, but Marc got no chance to speculate on this or utter a word. Ake didn't come up to Marc's shoulder (Ake didn't come up to anyone's shoulder), but she quickly caught him in a hug that took his breath away.

"I'm so glad to see you again, Marc," she said earnestly.

"It's great to see you again too, Ake," he gasped.

Ake repeated her surprising greeting as each of their friends arrived, Ingrid equaled her enthusiasm and lifted her from the floor. When the hubbub died down, Marc asked the question they were all dying to ask.

"Ake, we're all glad you've come, but the Tchalahn are an order with strict discipline. Has something happened?"

"Yes, something has happened," Ake replied, "but not what you may think. And besides, I have learned all that can be learned from the Tchalahn. I have been dispatched."

Their faces lit up with astonishment and joy. Many of the Tchalahn were sent to it's far flung sanctuaries to offer counsel and comfort to any in need and to seek the secrets of their own souls. Many resided in quiet retreats, including the ones on Serenity, learning how to take the journey that is life. But for a very few there remained no lessons, nothing that could be taught. These were the ones dispatched, to find new truths.

Ake scotched their congratulations. "It is not important. I would have come regardless." She stood facing them, relaxed, alert, calm, with her tail curling around her ankles. With some reluctance she took out a recording chip. "A few months ago I was on a mission to Kerama in the CSP. A skunk came to us one day for solace and advice. It happened to be the one to counsel him. You might recognize his name, but it's not important. He told me a tale so strange that no one else had yet believed him. I had to believe. He has met one of the New People.

"The skunk had been kidnapped by a well organized band of slavers. He found the..." Ake stopped short and turned to Chrystal. "What's the singular for New People?"

"Human," Chrys replied. "We've had news, too. We'll fill you in later. Go on, please."

"All right. He found the human while trying to escape. The human and his companion, a Leoni, were killed in the attempt. The skunk told the CSP authorities, but they either didn't believe him or chose not to act, even though he had proof."

"And that is his proof you have there?" Marc asked.

"Yes," Ake answered. "I picked his pocket and made a copy of his data before returning the chip. I know it was necessary, but I feel only shame."

Marc stepped over to her and accepted the chip. "Ake, we have all done things that we would rather have not done in this effort. But we recently learned that the humans are not looking for their people, after all. That means that we are their only hope of rescue."

"Slavers," fumed Haley. "those suckers are going to wish the humans had found them when I get through."

"They are elusive," Ake said, "and they don't have the people we're looking for. The slavers seem to have found a lone scout and were as surprised as the skunk."

"What did you finally advise the skunk to do?" asked Donnaly.

"I had to advise him as my feelings told me to. I told him to follow his instinctive revulsion to what had happened. I told him to fight them."

"Good for you!" Ingrid boomed. "I was afraid you'd tell him some grin-and-bear-it philosophy."

"Ingrid, you know should better. The Michi have been fighters throughout their history."

Ingrid and Haley both wore puzzled faces. The mice almost never fought with anyone. Ake sighed and determined to make up the gap in their education.

"Our homeworld, Niche, has a particularly dangerous native predator, a wolf-like creature we call Luparus. They can weigh up to 600 pounds, they hunt in packs, and they have no fear at all of sentient beings. We were easy prey for the Luparus until the advent of gunpowder, but we always fought. We just understand that death is part of life, and that fate is what it is. That doesn't mean you cannot defy your fate, and it certainly doesn't mean you have to like it. It is our fate to be set upon by evil. What better defiance than to fight?"

Marc had plugged the chip into a nearby terminal and it disgorged its information. "These are bioscans and genetic charts. Chrys, can you make anything of them?"

She watched the data scroll by for a few moments. "I can't tell too much. This is mostly raw data. It needs a translation and analysis program. It just looks so...normal. Ake, are you sure this is data on a human?"

"Yes. The skunk guarded it well, and there was truth in every word he spoke. I am certain."

"All right," said Marc decisively, "we finally have some solid leads, hard data, and the certainty that the humans have a missing ship, and that those people need help. This is a time when the conventions of normal life do not apply. We must conduct this as we would a war. And in this kind of war, only success matters.

"Now, here's what we're gonna do."

• • •

Verge opened the door quietly and saw at once that silence was unnecessary. In spite of the late hour Pearl was sitting up in bed reading a lap screen, and looked up as he entered. She smiled warmly as he crossed to the bed and delivered their daughter for her feeding. Pearl slipped her lacy wrap off one shoulder, kissed her mate, and cradled the infant to her breast, hissing softly as Leeri's small, sharp teeth added another tiny, proud scar of motherhood.

Verge winced in sympathy. "I wish you didn't have to do that. We could feed her your milk from a bottle, you know."

"Not my baby, Verge. I want my nipples roughened. I want to feel like our child's mother."

"And how does our child's mother feel this evening?"

"Just fine. The physician was right. I just needed a few days rest. And a couple of thousand crowns in treatment. Verge! How are we going to pay..."

"Marc has taken care of it," Verge said soothingly. "He won't allow us to pay him back, either. Says it's a point of honor between pilots, as if I were in his league. Really, he's very wealthy and known for his generosity."

"And he knows we're broke, doesn't he?"

Verge didn't answer. He just brushed his hand gently across her cheek. She responded by pushing against his hand, rubbing the side of her head against it, taking the pleasure of his touch.

She stopped with reluctance and looked at him sadly. "We lost the cargo, too, didn't we?"

No sense hiding bad news, he thought. "Yes."

"And we'll play hell getting another one from any broker after failing the consignment, right?"

Again, "Yes."

She shook her head sadly. "You should have taken me back to the ship. The 'doc could have..."

"The 'doc would have killed you," he insisted. "No auto-doc can handle a Felderis' virus unsupported. I'd sell the ship and maroon us here before I'd let anything happen to you."

They were silent with their thoughts until Leeri was full and dozing off. Verge took her back to the drawing room's temporary nursery and put her to bed. Shortly after, he went downstairs and seated himself in the breakfast nook, the vast mansion's coziest spot. Arthur the housemaster,

an aged and wise red squirrel, took one look at the drooping posture and forlorn expression and brought Verge a tankard of fresh warm milk. An unbidden bit of childhood would often raise the spirits. Verge remained desperate. *What am I going to do?* he thought.

Marc walked in from the kitchen with a plate of shauga, small chunks of meat dipped in egg batter and quick fried to give each a crunchy shell and an almost raw middle. A delight for any carnivore.

"Mind if I join you?" Marc asked.

"Not at all," Verge answered, his voice trying to hide his misery and failing.

Marc let Verge quietly munch a dozen of the succulent morsels before speaking again. "I wonder if I could ask a favor of you?"

"Are you kidding?" Verge said, his mood buoyed by food. "I only owe you my mate's life. Take my head, if you like."

"Don't kid about that," Marc snapped, his tail suddenly stick-straight. Then he winced, embarrassed, and let his breath out with a sigh. "There are some things in this house that are not to be spoken of lightly. Family history. There's no way you could know. Sorry."

Verge only nodded and counted himself fortunate. He knew too well the Ryo passion for revenge, a need as great as that for food, or territory, or mates. Once honor or family was injured and that lethal need was felt, neither blood, nor wealth, nor time mattered. Only success mattered.

"I apologize if I have given offense. Forgive me." Verge forced his ears down flat and was as contrite as he looked. He certainly did not want to insult one he owed so much to.

"We can't apologize to each other all night. We'll never get to sleep," Marc said. He raised his own mug. "Your health, and long life, sir."

"And yours, sir," Verge answered, and they drank. "You came to ask something of me. Name it."

"Don't be too quick. This is business. I have a high priority cargo to go out to Eysherril by the end of next week. I was going to ask you to carry it."

"What's the cargo?" Verge asked with no trace of the suspicion he felt.

"Fresh Lake Craft shellfish."

Shellfish! Verge's mind tallied it up. High volume, low mass, bonuses for early delivery. And Eysherril was beginning to turn out much demanded medicines from the

planet's unusual flora. Wealthy, remote, and in need of cargo carriers.

Marc went on, "Actually, my brother Dimitri owns the business, but he's always complaining that he can't get shipping direct to the Frontier. And besides," Marc grinned, "I know where his baby pictures are hidden."

"And you think this is a favor to you?" Verge said, amazed. "Do you realize what you've done for us?"

"Yes. I've asked you to take a high value perishable cargo to the edge of nowhere on damned short notice. And I expect I'll pay dearly for it. I'm also having a few cases of the cargo put in your ship's galley. I saw how Pearl loves the stuff." Marc started to leave, then seemed to remember something. "Oh, I want you to take this as well," he said, handing Verge a large, safety envelope. "These are letters of introduction to our family's companies. They're all over the place since the Ryo-Vul war ended. If you're ever stuck without a cargo, just find one of 'em and show them these. They're bound to have something going somewhere."

Verge rose with his treasures, barely able to croak his gratitude. Then he walked toward the great hall and the stairs that led to Pearl. Then he ran.

"Softie," came Chrys' voice from behind Marc. He swiveled around to face her, smiling. "And your brother was never a baby. If he was, he started out by banging his rattle on a cash register."

"Too true, my love," Marc replied, "and my motives were all ulterior. They are thoroughly in our debt now, and will be an extra set of eyes and ears in the Frontier. Their innocence will protect them from any harm, since they won't know that they're looking for anything other than the 'unusual'. And we may have need of a freetrader we can trust and that can't be easily traced to us."

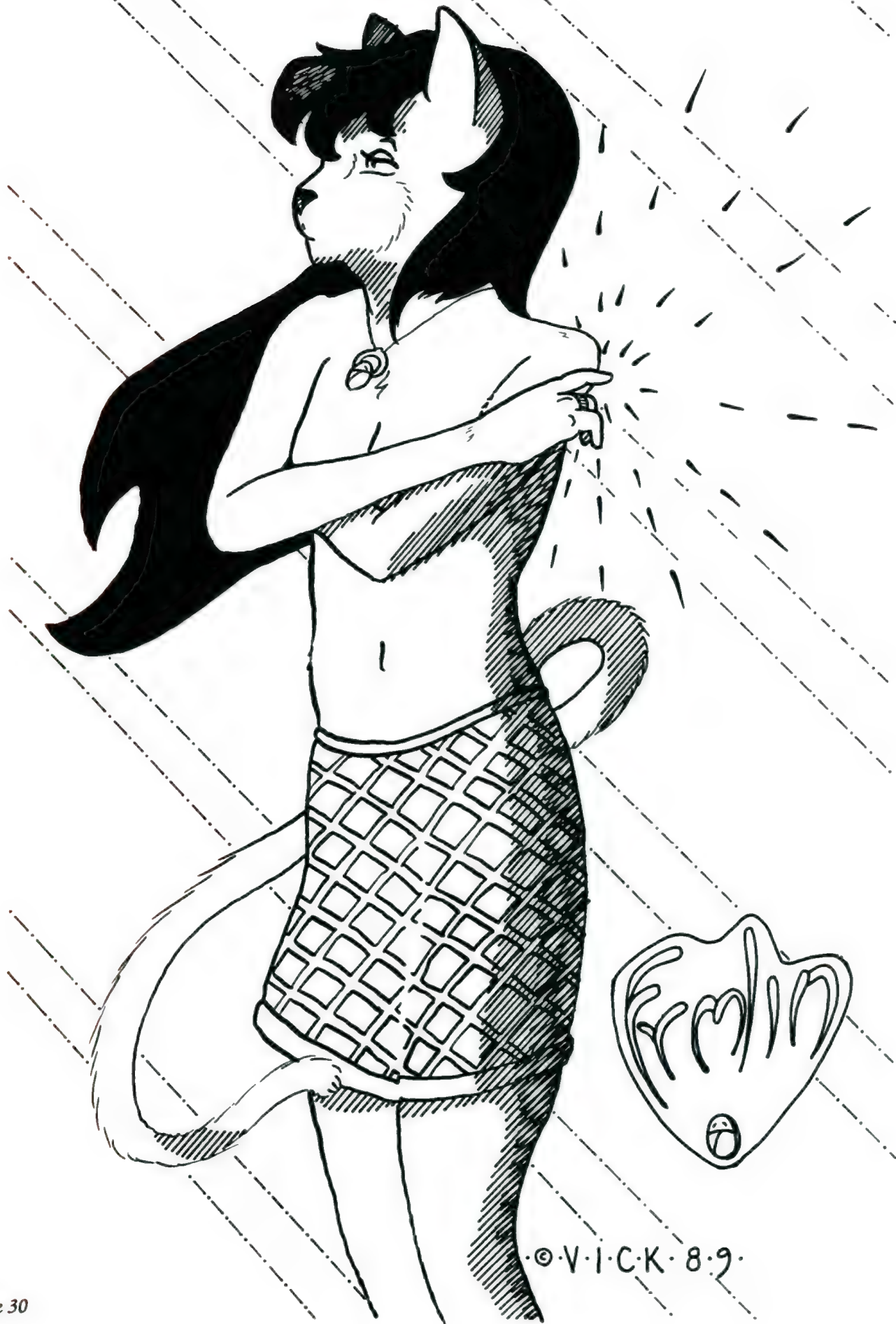
Chrys moved close to Marc as he stood. "So, not a bit of goodness in all you've done for them," she said sweetly. "You liar. You would have done the same thing even if you hadn't seen Pearl's star. I ought to demand a penance for your pretended perfidy. Maybe a bit..."

From the green room far away came the unmistakable sounds of feline passion, peaking in a boisterous crescendo, not quite fading away. Chrystal's eyes grew wide and she gasped in astonishment as the lusty yowls of physical celebration sounded again.

"A penance you say? D above middle C?" Marc said thoughtfully, "I think we can manage that."

Chrys dissolved in delighted giggles, and Marc swept her into his arms and headed for their bed. ☺

*to be continued*



# IMAGES

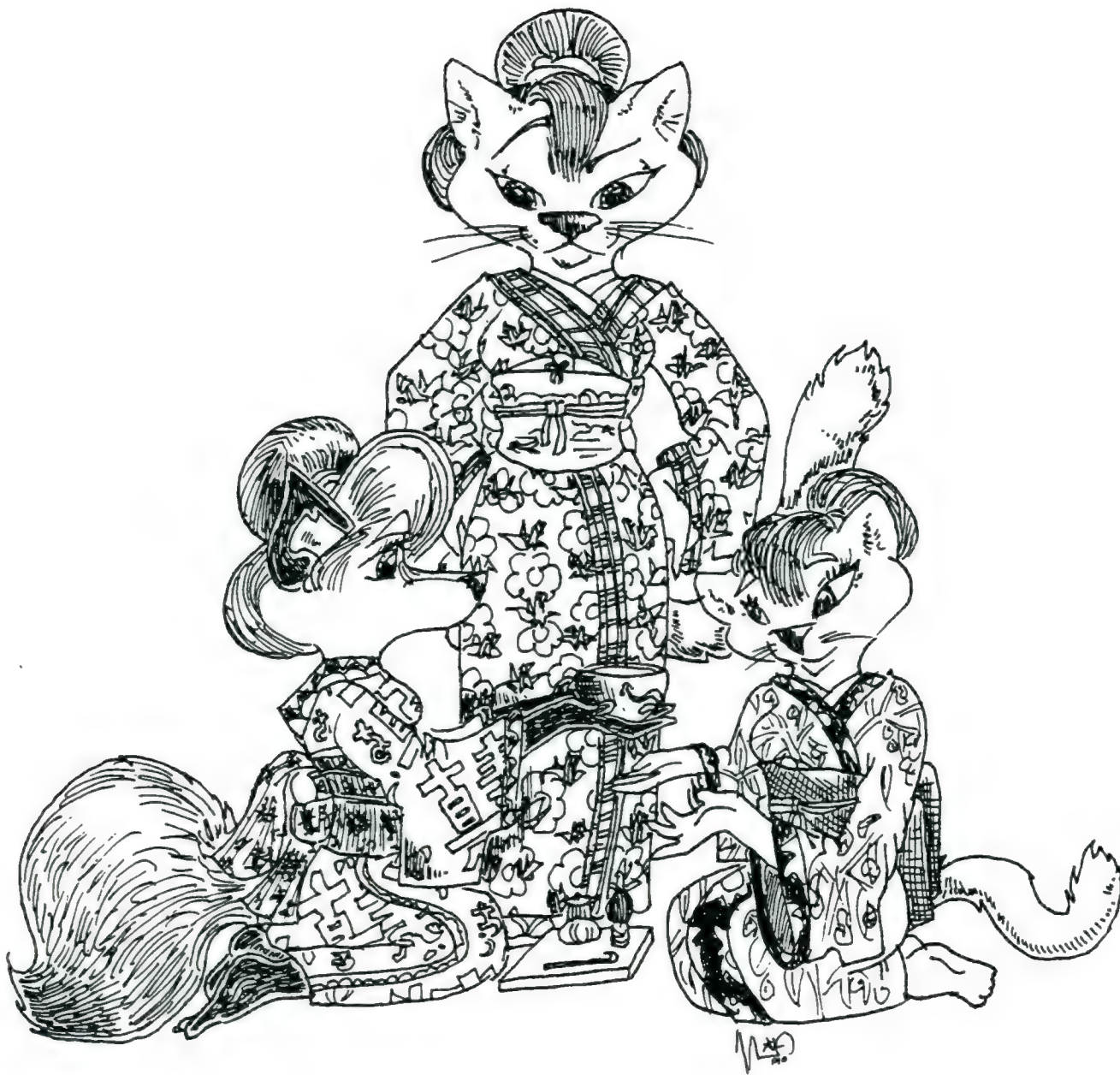


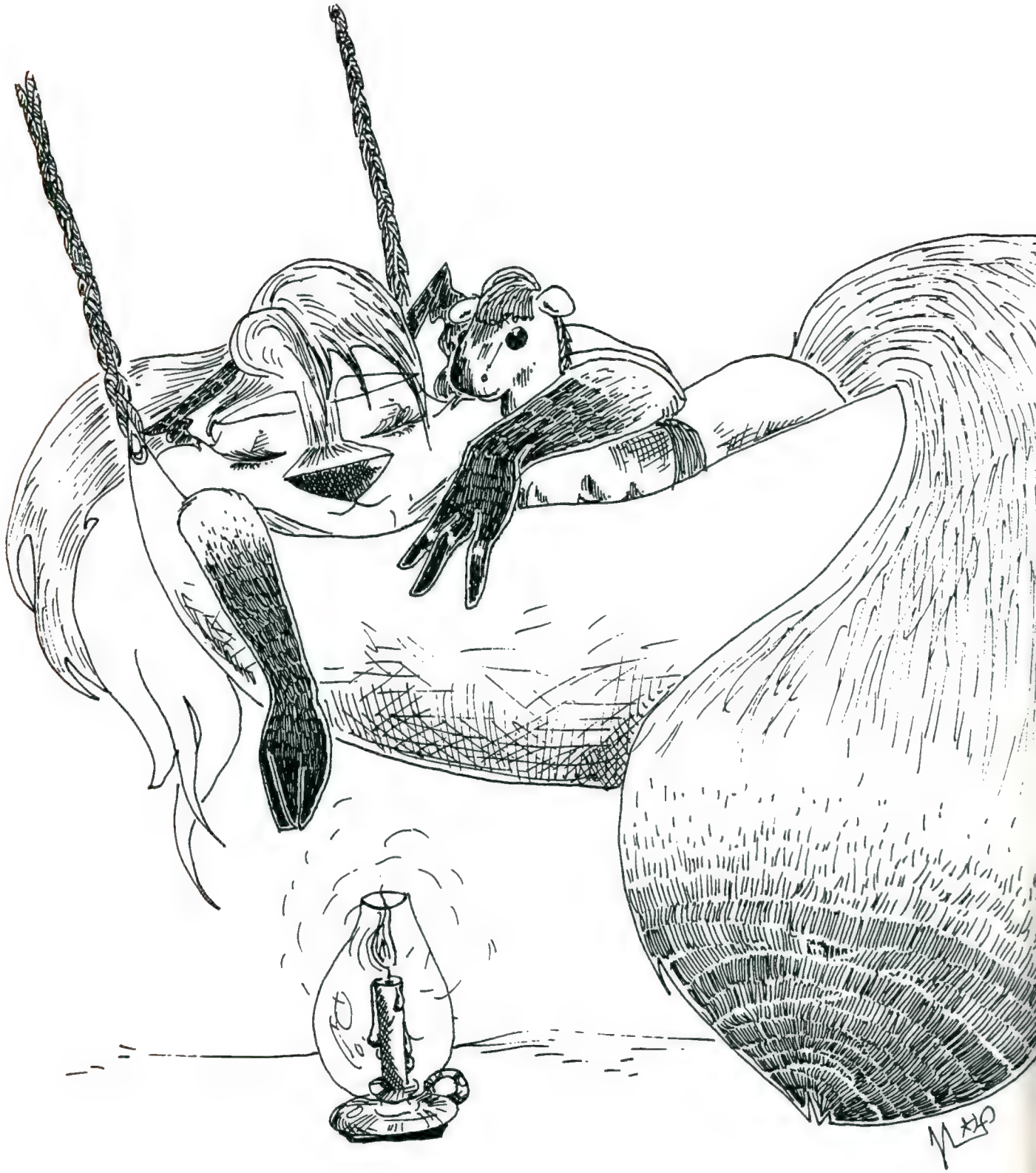
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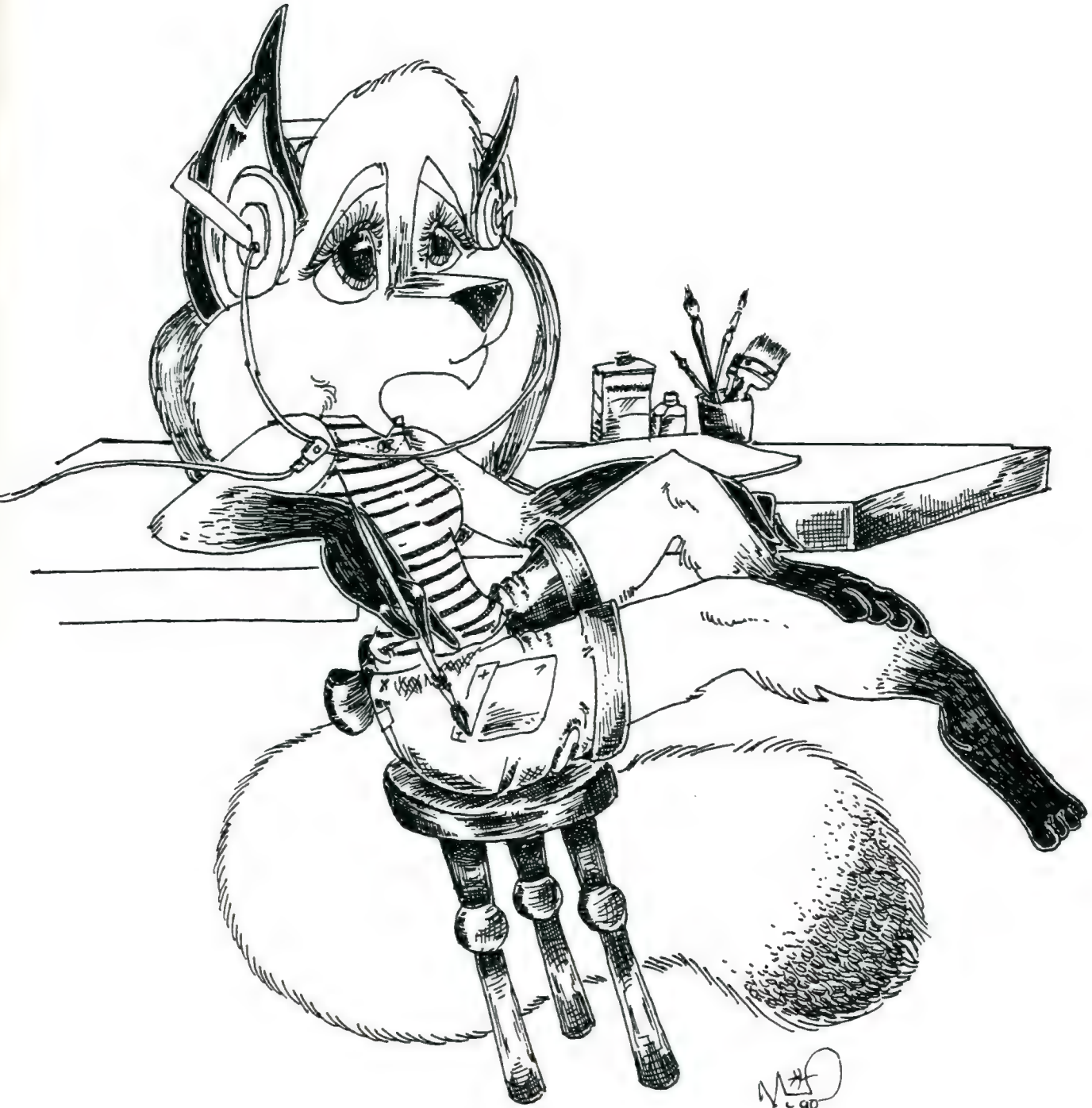
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Δ Friendly Farewell.....VI.  
Flights of Fantasy.....I.



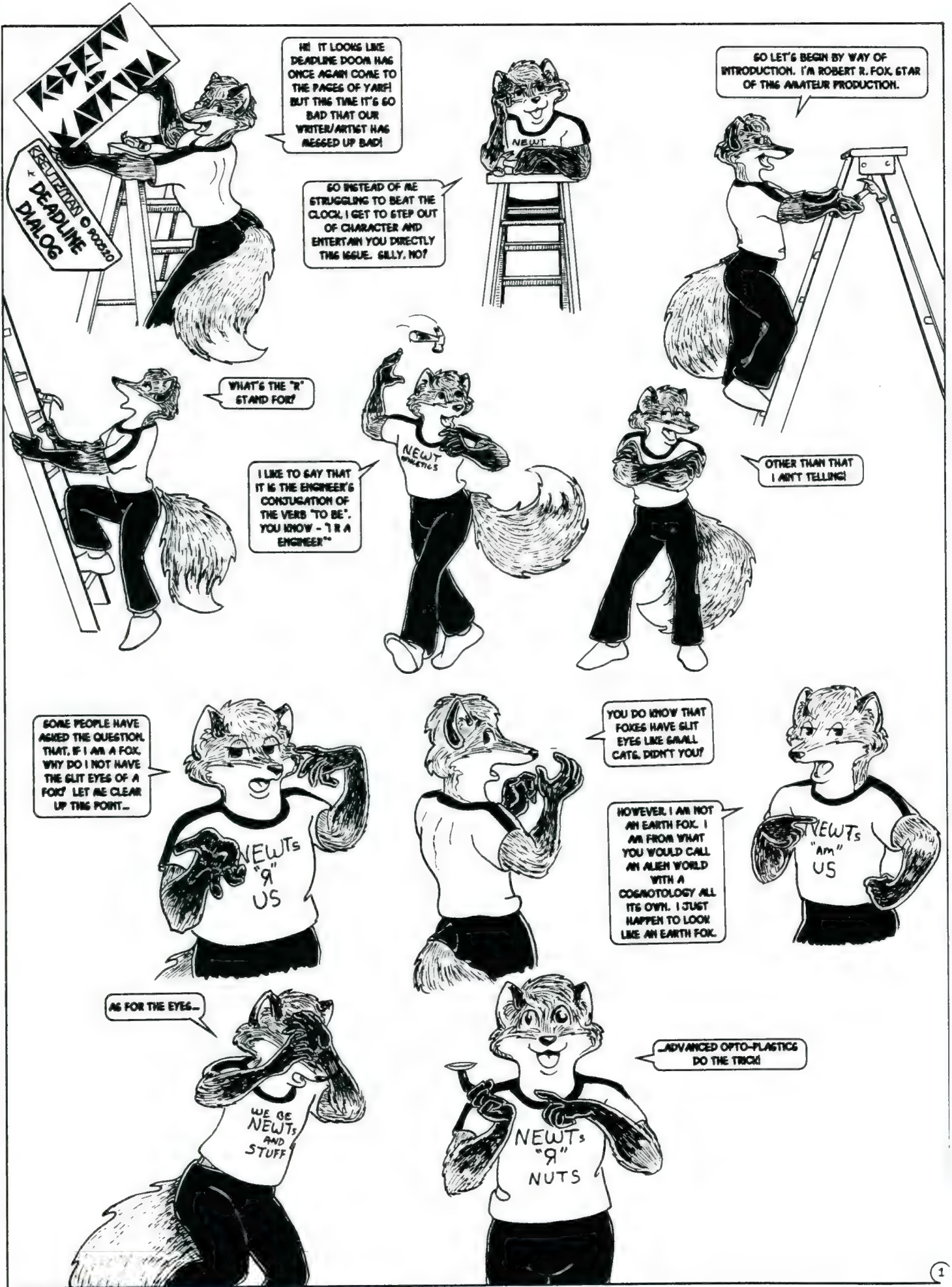












HI IT LOOKS LIKE DEADLINE DOOM HAS ONCE AGAIN COME TO THE PAGES OF YAF! BUT THIS TIME IT'S SO BAD THAT OUR WRITER/ARTIST HAS MESS'ED UP BAD!

SO LET'S BEGIN BY WAY OF INTRODUCTION. I'M ROBERT R. FOX STAR OF THIS AMATEUR PRODUCTION.

REITZBERG © 2003  
DEADLINE DIALOG

SO INSTEAD OF ME STRUGGLING TO BEAT THE CLOCK, I GET TO STEP OUT OF CHARACTER AND ENTERTAIN YOU DIRECTLY THIS ISSUE. SILLY, NO?

NEWT

WHAT'S THE "R" STAND FOR?

I LIKE TO SAY THAT IT IS THE ENGINEER'S CONJUGATION OF THE VERB "TO BE". YOU KNOW - "I R A ENGINEER"

OTHER THAN THAT I AMN'T TELLING!

SOME PEOPLE HAVE ASKED THE QUESTION THAT, IF I AM A FOX, WHY DO I NOT HAVE THE GLIT EYES OF A FOX? LET ME CLEAR UP THIS POINT...

YOU DO KNOW THAT FOXES HAVE GLIT EYES LIKE SMALL CATS, DIDNT YOU?

NEWTS  
"9"  
US

HOWEVER, I AM NOT AN EARTH FOX. I AM FROM WHAT YOU WOULD CALL AN ALIEN WORLD WITH A COGNATOLOGY ALL ITS OWN. I JUST HAPPEN TO LOOK LIKE AN EARTH FOX.

NEWTS  
"Am"  
US

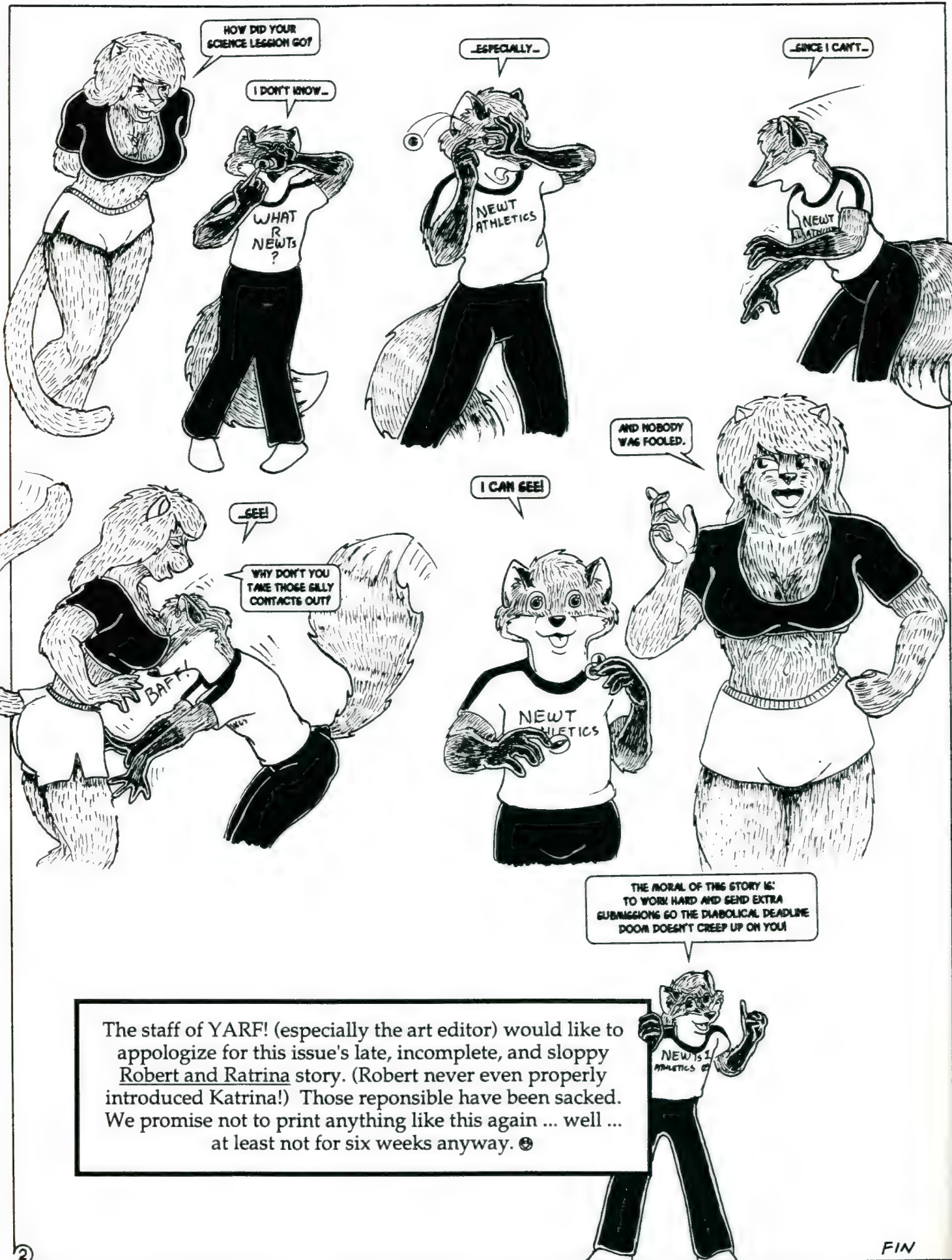
AS FOR THE EYES...

...ADVANCED OPTO-PLASTICS DO THE TRICK!

WE BE  
NEWTS  
AND  
STUFF

NEWTS  
"9"  
NUTS

\*ENGINEERS HAVE A REPUTATION FOR NOT KNOWING HOW TO SPELL NOR HOW TO USE CORRECT GRAMMAR.



HOW DID YOUR SCIENCE LESSON GO?

I DON'T KNOW...

...ESPECIALLY...

...SINCE I CAN'T...

WHY DON'T YOU TAKE THOSE GILLY CONTACTS OUT?

...GEE!

I CAN SEE!

AND NOBODY WAS FOOLED.

THE MORAL OF THIS STORY IS: TO WORK HARD AND SEND EXTRA SUBMISSIONS GO THE DIABOLICAL DEADLINE DOOM DOESN'T CREEP UP ON YOU!

The staff of YARF! (especially the art editor) would like to appologize for this issue's late, incomplete, and sloppy Robert and Ratrina story. (Robert never even properly introduced Katrina!) Those reponsible have been sacked. We promise not to print anything like this again ... well ... at least not for six weeks anyway. ☹







TV90





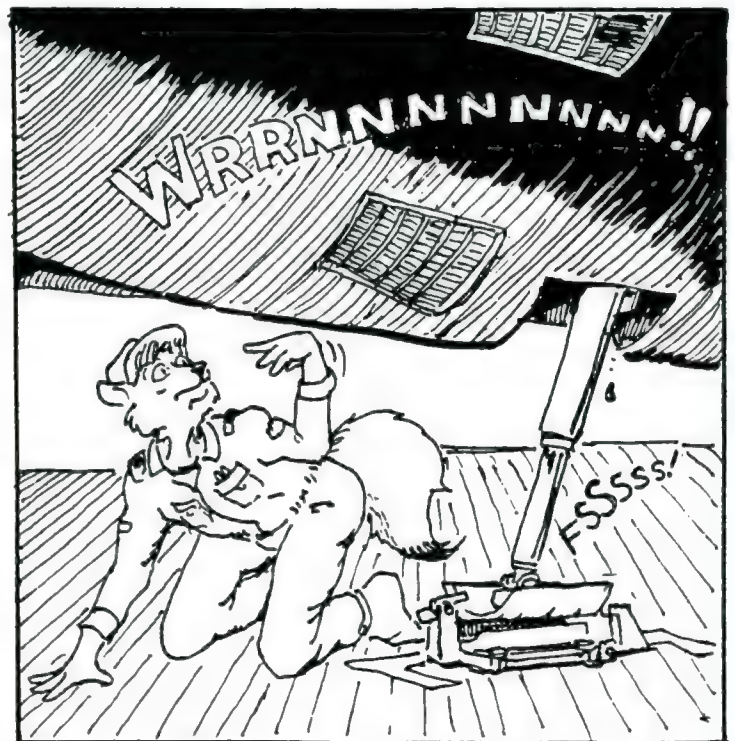
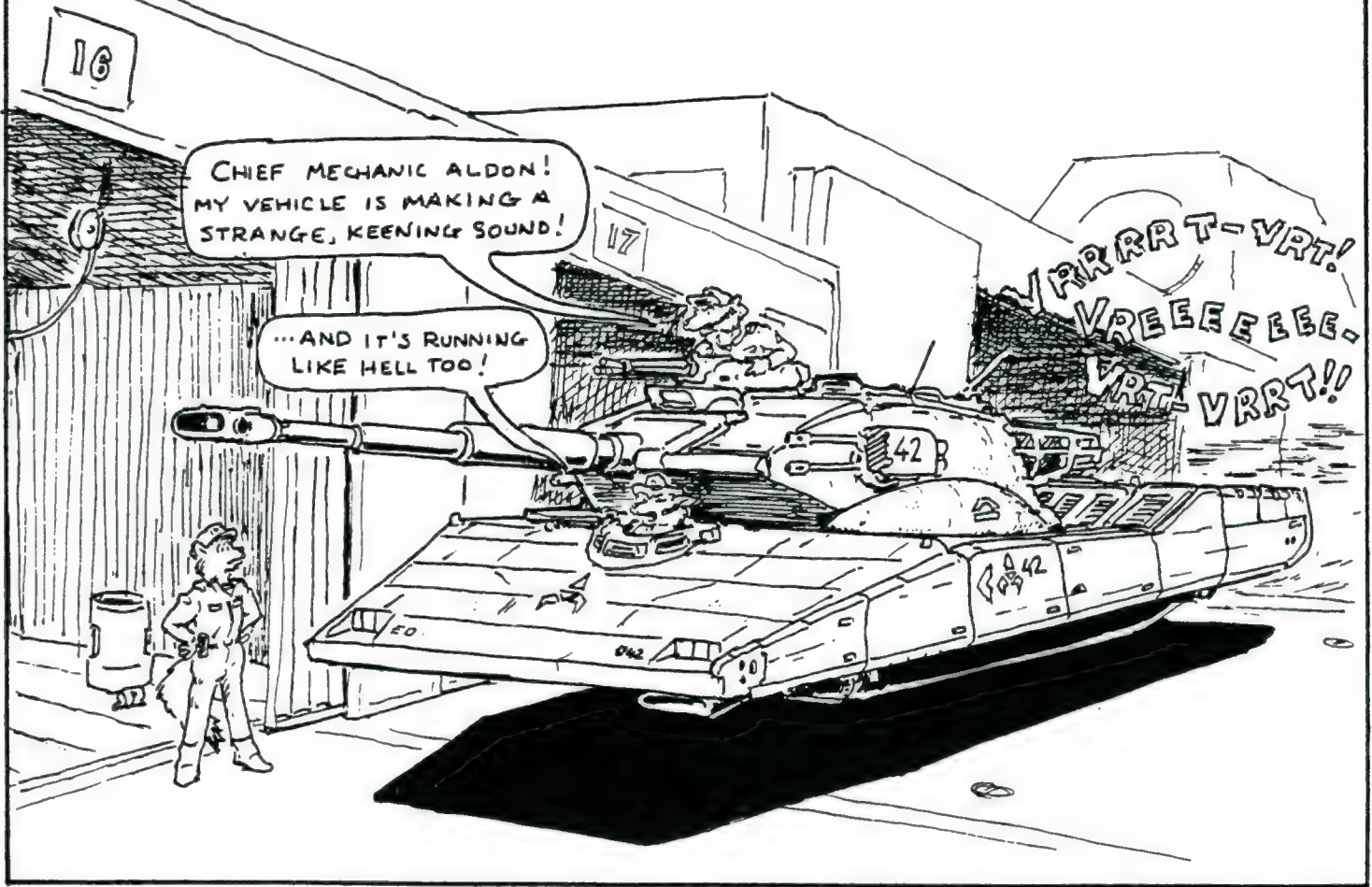
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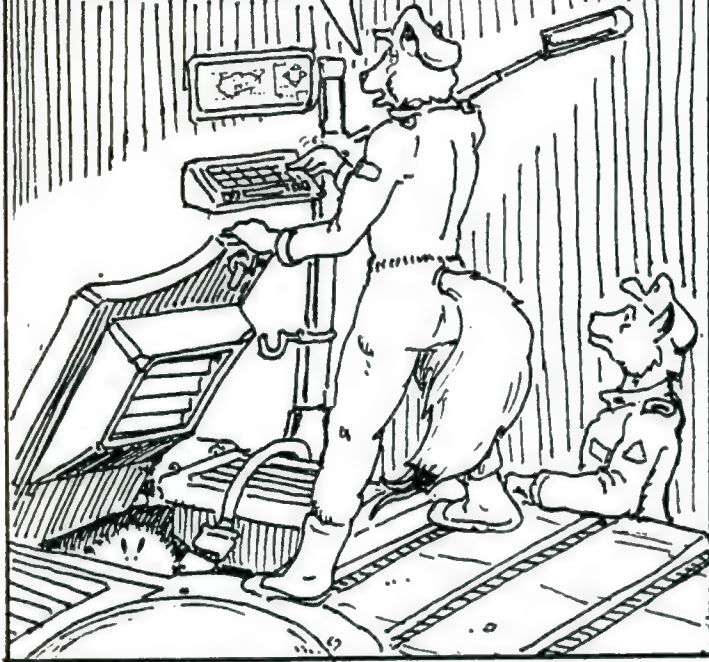


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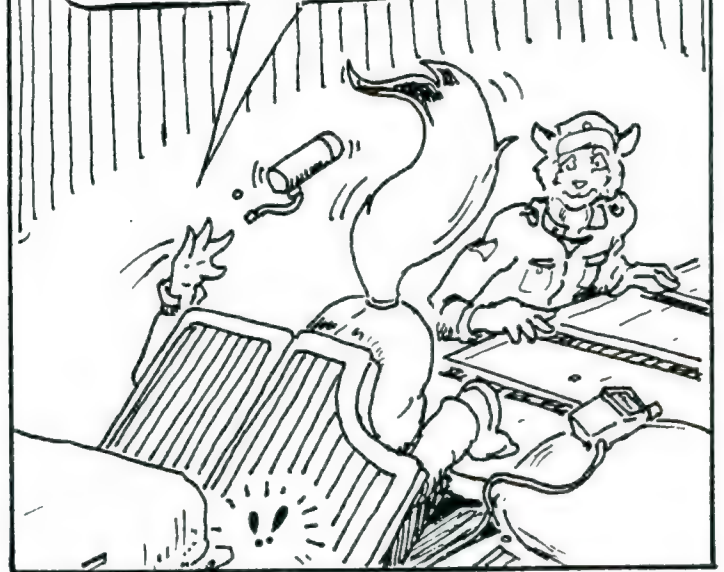
ONE FINE DAY AT OUTPOST ECHO DELTA....



DIAGNOSTIC COMPUTER SAYS EVERYTHING'S NOMINAL... THE PROBLEM IS DEFINITELY IN THE ENGINE COMPARTMENT. AT LEAST THAT'S WHERE THE SOUND SEEMS TO BE COMING FROM!



THE CONDENSER COIL'S SHOT... BUT THAT'S NORMAL... THE WIRING LOOKS A LITTLE CHEWED UP, BUT THAT SHOULDN'T BE THE PROBLEM!



IT'S DEFINITELY NOT THE BALANCE BUS, NOR CAN IT BE THE MAG-LEV SEQUENCER... ... I'M GONNA HAVE TO PULL THE ENGINE MODULE!



LATER...



OKAY... SO THAT'S NOT IT EITHER! NOW I'M GETTIN' VEXED!



# BOOK BITES!

## Anthropomorphic Book Reviews - By Taz

This column begins a series of reviews on books that would be welcome on any anthropomorphic bookshelf. The last several years have seen a good number of books produced by a variety of publishers and we'll be looking at some of the best in coming issues. Most will be on the subject of animation. But on occasion, we'll look at something a bit unusual or just a good book you should have. So to begin...

As a fan of classic animation, I'm always on the lookout for more information on the subject. One of the best reference materials I've yet to come across is "Looney Tunes and Merrie Melodies - A Complete Illustrated Guide to the Warner Bros. Cartoons" by Jerry Beck and Will Friedwald (An Owl Book, published by Henry Holt and Company - \$14.95 publisher's suggested price.). From the 1930 "Sinkin' in the Bathtub" featuring Bosko, the Talk-Ink Kid to 1988's "Daffy Duck's Quackbusters", this book covers them all. The author's claim to have personally viewed each one of the over 1000 films and have provided screen credits and a synopsis for each one. As they explain in the introduction: "Our biggest problem was obtaining all the screen credits, a chore made difficult by Warner Bros. policy of reissuing earlier cartoons and replacing the original credits with a new 'Blue Ribbon' main title. If credits are missing from an entry, then it was no where to be found."

Here's a typical entry (for a personal fave) for 1955's "One Froggy Evening". In the minds of many, it's one of the best examples of Warner Brother's Cartoons at their peak.

### "ONE FROGGY EVENING"

Dec 31; MM; Directed by Charles M. Jones; Story by Michael Maltese; Animation by Abe Levitow, Richard Thompson, Ken Harris, and Ben Washam; Layouts by Robert Gribbroek; Backgrounds by Phillip DeGuard; Music by Milt Franklyn.

Picture, if you will, a member of a wrecking crew demolishing an 1892 building and opening the cornerstone to see a frog entering stage left doing a song and dance, singing "Hello, My Ragtime Gal."

The finder's mind races with the possibilities of getting rich by exploiting this singing frog. But the frog will not sing if anyone is present. At a talent agency, the finder gets an agent to look at the frog (today called "Michigan J. Frog"). Investing his mattress of life savings in renting a theater, The frog does his stuff atop a high wire, finishing just as the entrepreneur manages to lift the jammed



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curtain. Months later, a policeman hears someone singing (Barber of Seville) in the park and when our friend points to the frog, the film dissolves to a shot of him in a psychopathic hospital, the frog leaning on a window bar crooning "Please Don't Talk About Me When I'm Gone." Years later, a broken and desolate man, he finally dumps the frog in the cornerstone of building about to be constructed. A hundred years pass, and rayguns disintegrate the old building. Some things never change, as the discoverer of this cornerstone is also convinced he can make a fortune with the singing frog.

One of the most celebrated films in animation history, and justly a masterpiece of concept, timing and nuance.

The entries in this book are not only limited to the theatrical shorts but also include special projects such as World War II's "Private Snafu" series (produced for the Army Signal Corp from 1943 to 1945) to the various television projects over the years. There is an entry for the pilot film for the Bosko Series (the first Warner Bros cartoon shorts), produced in 1929 by Hugh Harman and Rudolf Ising. You'll even find a mention of the "Tiny Tunes" project underway by Steven Spielberg to compete with the likes of the "Muppet Babies".

There is a complete index by title, as well as a character index. For example, we can look for "Duck Dodgers in the 24 1/2 Century" and the index lists it by the title, year (1953), and page (251). Or we can look for all the films that the Tasmanian Devil or Taz for short (please, no puns-I'll handle those!). It lists the following films: "Devil May Hare" - 1954; "Bedeviled Rabbit" - 1957; "Ducking the Devil" - 1957; "Bill of Hare" - 1962; "Dr. Devil and Mr. Hare" - 1964; and "Fright Before Christmas" - 1979. Of course for a more major star, the list is longer. But you get the idea.

If you are a Warner Brothers fan, this book is one of several that rates as a "must-have". It should be kept right next to your TV remote so that you can refer to it at a moment's notice to look up the listing for that cartoon as it shows up

on one of the many Cartoon Classic programs such as Nickelodeon's "Looney Tunes" ( every night at 7:30 pm ).

On the other side of the coin for this issue's review is a book that deals with what some refer to as the real world. "The Audubon Society Pocket Guide to Familiar Mammals of North America" (A Borzoi Book, published by Alfred A Knopf. Suggested Price \$ 4.95 ) is a great handy reference tool. "Pocket" well describes this as the book is about the size of the average post card and is less than 200 pages in length. It's one of a series of guides; others include Birds, Flowers, Fossils, Insects and Spiders, Repetiles and Amphibians, Rocks and Minerals, and Trees.

It's well organized and very easy to use. There's a track guide ( Handy at the local water hole to know your guests by their marks! ) and helpful hints on finding mammals in the field. A typical entry is set up by common name and then gives the scientific (Latin) name. There's a map showing the area where the entry lives and then a brief description.

Here's a good example ...

Nine-banded Armadillo *Dasypus novemcinctus*

Armadillos are inveterate burrow diggers. They live in burrows, dig in search of insects, and will even try to escape from a predator by quickly excavating a tunnel right on the spot. While burrowing has made enemies among livestock owners, it is also the secret of this armored animal's success, for armadillos obtain more than half their

food underground. Heres is one animal that is easy to see because it usually becomes so engrossed in its burrowing that you can walk right up to it. When it finally notices you, an armadillo will scamper away over the leafy ground and disappear.

Identification: 31 - 34". A short-legged, long-tailed animal with body, top of head, and tail covered with hard, scaly plates. Middle of body has 9 (or fewer) flexible, scaly bands which allow for bending.

Similiar Species: No other mammal has scaly armor plates.

Habitat: Sandy areas and streamside thickets.

Range: S. United States from Texas, SE Kansas, S. Missouri, and Gulf Coast east to Florida.

Each entry is topped off by a good color photo of the subject. Some of the pictures are quite good and all views are of the subjects in their habitats; not stuffed and mounted in a display.

This is a good little book and well worth the price.

For the next issue: We'll take a look at the Encyclopedia of Walt Disney Animated Characters.

So until next time ... Remember - Buy Acme! ☺



Well Doc, this vixen walked past me and it just sorta happened and now they won't go back to normal.



RCA 1990

# The Last Bits

Computers. They are everywhere these high-tech times... and furry fandom is nothing if not high-tech! Computer bulletin board systems (BBS's) have become an important means of communication for furry fandom. Following is a listing of known funny-animals oriented BBS's... we know this list is by no means incomplete. If you know of any "furry" BBS's that should be in this list, please let us know, and we will include it in future issues. ☺



In semi-random order...

| SYSTEM NAME            | SYSTEM OPERATOR | PHONE                         | PC PURSUIT OUTDIAL | MAXIMUM BAUD RATE                          | NOTES                           |
|------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------------|--------------------|--|---------------------------------|
| The Fur Side           | Charlie Kellner | 415-571-1486                  | CAPAL              | 2,400                                      |                                 |
| Rowrbrazzle BBS        | Dwight Dutton   | 714-842-1263,<br>714-842-9799 | CASAN              | 9,600 (HST)                                | 2 lines                         |
| The Tiger's Den        | Shayn Raney     | 714-530-2554                  | CASAN              | 2,400                                      |                                 |
| Kyim's Scratching Post | Kyim Granger    | 415-452-0350                  | CAOAK              | 9,600 (V.42)                               |                                 |
| Stormgate Aerie        | Nicolai Shapero | 213-822-6729                  | CALAN              | 9,600 (HST)                                |                                 |
| The Foxes' Den         | Lance Rund      | 408-736-4777                  | CASJO              | 19,200 (Trailblazer),<br>9,600 (HST, V.32) | Official YARF!<br>BBS. 4 lines. |

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L.Runo'90

Eat your heart out, Leonardo

**YARF!**

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