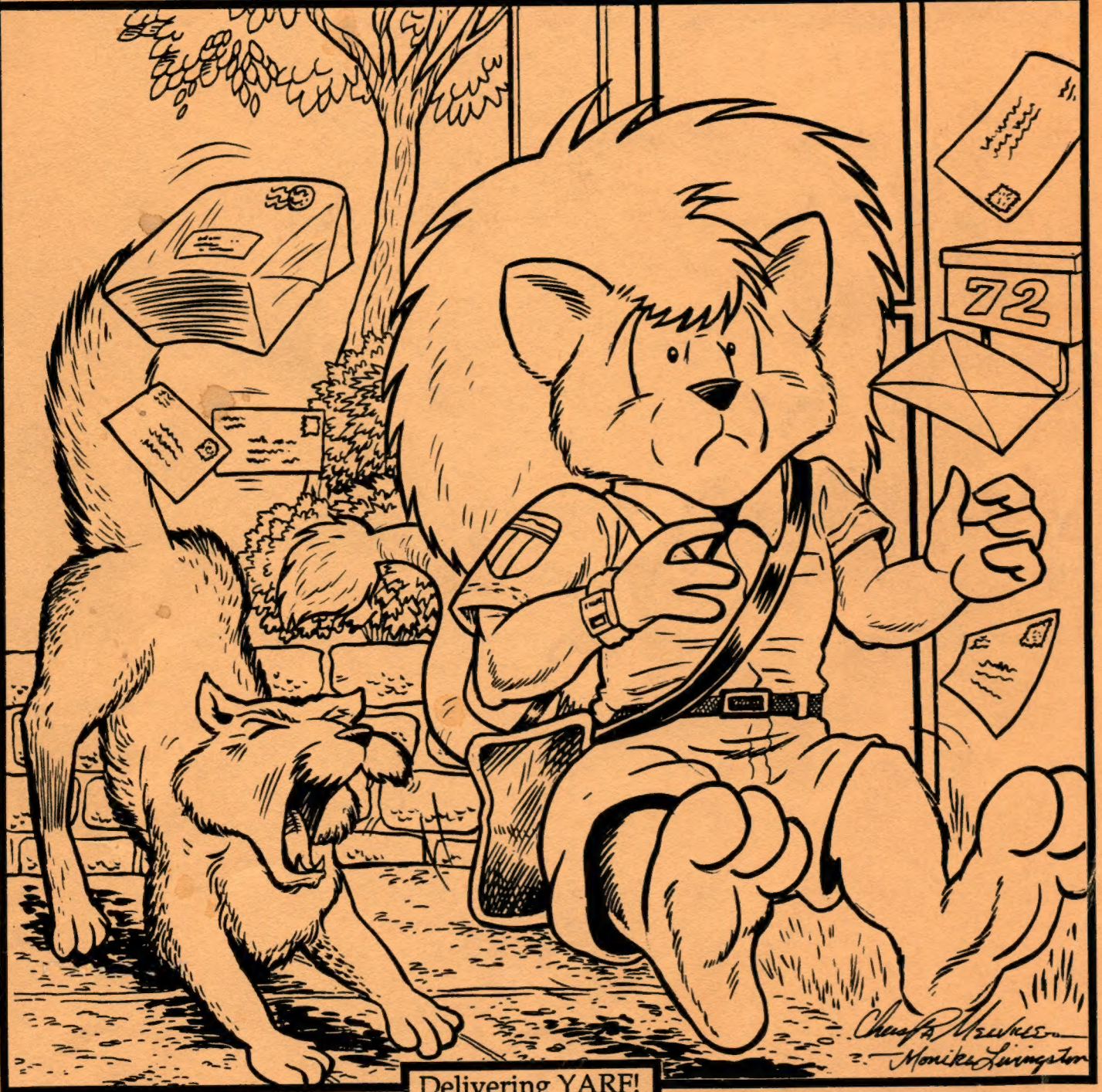


Issue Eight

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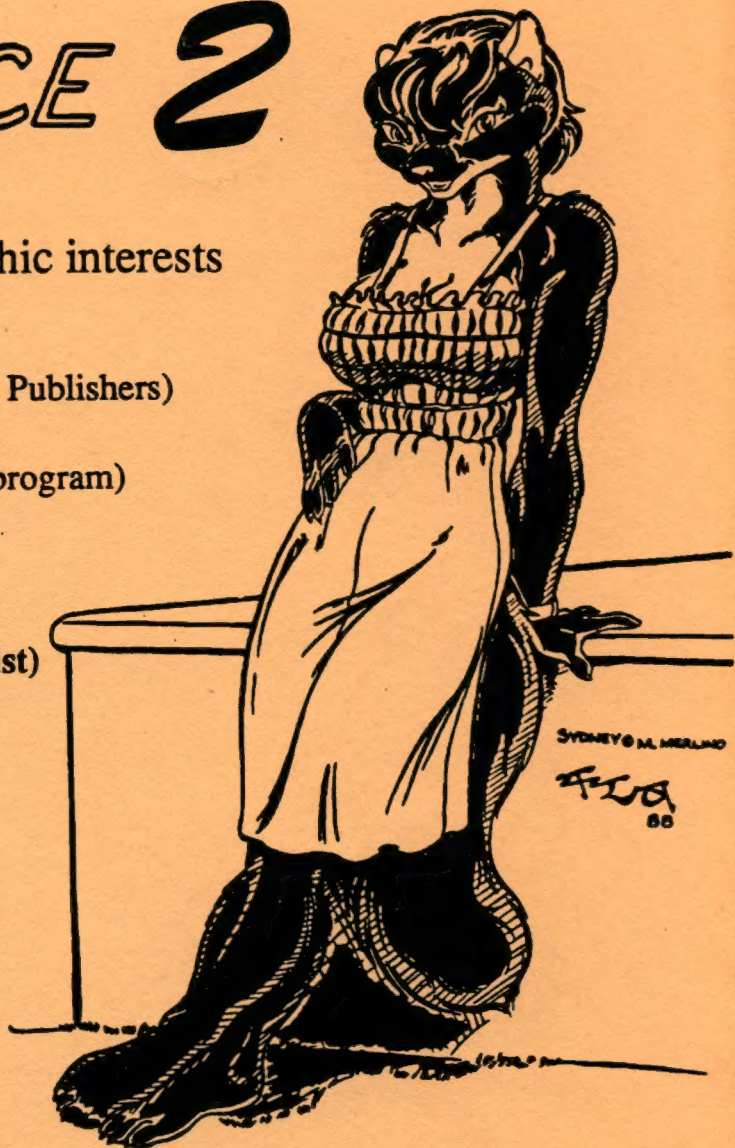
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Fiction from Mark Stanley
...and other stuff

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Flaming Hairballs ●●●●●●●●●●

Editorial ramblings and letters of comics from us to you, and from you to us

All good things must come to an end, including our \$3.00 cover price. Postage, printing, and supplies like mailing envelopes are getting more and more expensive. So, in the interest of financial solvency, this is our last \$3.00 issue. Starting with issue #9, our cover price will be \$4.00 (more for oversized issues, such as #10). Also, back issues will be going to \$4.00 as soon as our stock of \$3.00 covers runs out—get yours now, before the price increases! (Subscriptions existing as of November 1 will be honored at \$3.00 per issue until they expire.)

Our back issue prices are currently as follows:

Issues 1-5	\$3.00
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When our stock of any particular issue runs out, its price will increase by \$1.00.

To help ease the pain of the increase in costs, our page count will go up by 4 to 8 pages per issue (depending upon the contents of that particular issue).

In other news:

- Our newest Way Cool contributor, Dave "Hitler's Regime Has Fallen, and It Can't Get Up!" Kuhn (his signature, not ours), has been hired by Don Bluth as an animator. Congratulations to him.
- Those of you who are Empires fans should check out Mythagoras (see their ad on the inside back cover) for a related story. Borderline is a strip set on another world—a "kinder, gentler" story which centers upon a group of soldiers in their day-to-day lives away from the front. "Guns. Trucks. Sociopolitical ramifications. Culture shock. Centaur-fu. Maggie-fu. Empires-fu. A five-bullet strip. Joe-Bob Voop sez, check it out."
- We're considering printing YARF! for sale in comic shops. What do you think? Show YARF! to your local comics pusher, and ask him if he would be interested in selling it. Ask yourself if you think YARF! would go over well with the local comics fans. Then, tell us! ●



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Issue 9	December 1, 1990
Issue 10	January 12, 1991 (ConFurence issue, double-sized. \$5.00 cover price)
Issue 11	February 23, 1991
Issue 12	April 6, 1991
Issue 13	May 18, 1991
Issue 14	June 22, 1991 (San Diego Comic Con issue, double-sized. \$5.00 cover price)
Issue 15	August 10, 1991
Issue 16	September 21, 1991
Issue 17	November 2, 1991
Issue 18	December 14, 1991

See you in 45...

Patten's Pontifications

Book Review: The Cold Moons

Reviewed by Fred Patten

The Cold Moons, by Aeron Clement. Illustrations & maps, by Jill Clement. New York, Delacorte Press, April 1989, xiii + 333 pages, \$16.95; ISBN 0-385-29694-0. New York, Dell Laurel, July 1990, xvi + 314 pages, \$8.95; ISBN 0-440-50331-0.

This is basically Watership Down with badgers instead of rabbits. It is more than a bland imitation, however. Badgers were protected in Britain until 1975, when they became identified as carriers of tuberculosis which was spreading to other animals, notably the domestic cattle population. A policy of killing infected badgers was applied so broadly that by the 1980s there was a serious danger of the total extinction of wild badgers in Britain. It was against this background that The Cold Moons was first published in Wales in 1987, to rally public and environmentalist support for the badgers.

Bamber, the sole survivor of a badger group gassed by humans, wanders into the larger community of Cilgwyn. His warning shocks its badgers, who react in various ways. Eldon, the complacent leader, hopes that it is a false alarm which they can ignore. Buckwheat, a council member, feels that they must migrate to a new home immediately. Palos, who seeks Eldon's position, tries to turn the disagreement to his advantage. The arrival of the humans with their poison gas and hunting dogs forces the badgers to flee before they are fully ready. Their long trek across Wales is beset with hardships, tragedy, and heroism. During its long course, the badgers gradually come to rely upon two younger, stronger guides. Beaufort, Buckwheat's son, is urged by his father to accept more responsibility; but while Beaufort is dutiful enough, he at first lacks the spark of leadership that the badgers desperately need. Kronos, Palos's son, is an even worse schemer than his father, and he plots to trick the badgers into accepting him as a benevolent leader who will soon reveal himself as a sadistic dictator. The Cold Moons tells of the badgers's search for a new home as they struggle against three enemies: the natural dangers of their trek; the deadly sabotage of Kronos which threatens to destroy them

before Beaufort can grow into leadership; and the pursuing governmental badger extermination units.

This is good enough to merit a favorable recommendation, but it is still close enough to Watership Down to make comparisons inevitable, and it does not match the literary genius of Richard Adams's classic. The Cold Moons is told in a narrative format; there is not a line of dialog in it. For example,

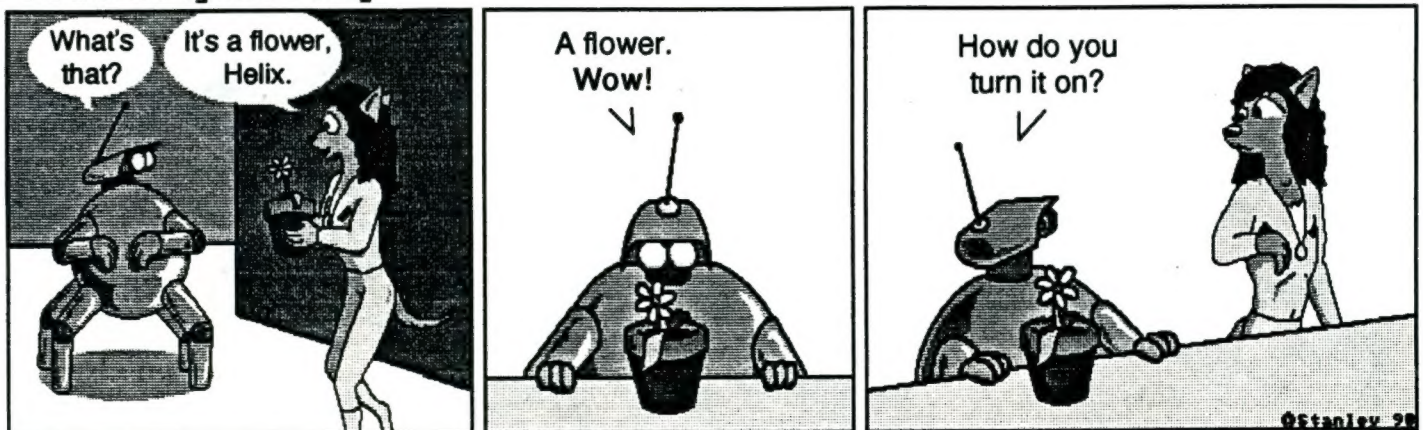
Buckwheat asked Eldon to convene the council and went to fetch Palos as Beaufort moved over to inform Molyar. Buckwheat found a very dejected Palos lying down alone, deserted even by his mate, Tauna. He glanced up on hearing Buckwheat's voice but refused to attend council. He no longer wanted any part of it or its members and just wanted to be left alone. Despite Buckwheat's continued pleading there was no change in Palos's attitude, and Buckwheat returned, bitterly disappointed in the badger who had changed from being an eminent figure to a pathetic one.

By presenting the entire novel in this third-person, voice-over manner, Clement mutes its intensity. The characters seem like historical figures rather than living people whom the readers can care about.

In both novels, the story continues beyond the point that the reader expects to be the end of the book. But Adams makes General Woundwort's attack against the rabbits' new home into an exciting extension of the story, whereas Clement's surprise addition seems weak and anticlimactic. Both novels radiate their authors' obvious love of nature, but Clement pushes his message too deliberately, to the extent that The Cold Moons has a Disneyish "all animals are friends; only Man the Hunter kills" air of propaganda aimed at the uneducated animal-loving urban public.

But these are quibbles. You may be annoyed by certain aspects of the novel, but you will not feel that you wasted your time by reading it. ☺

Freefall by Mark Stanley

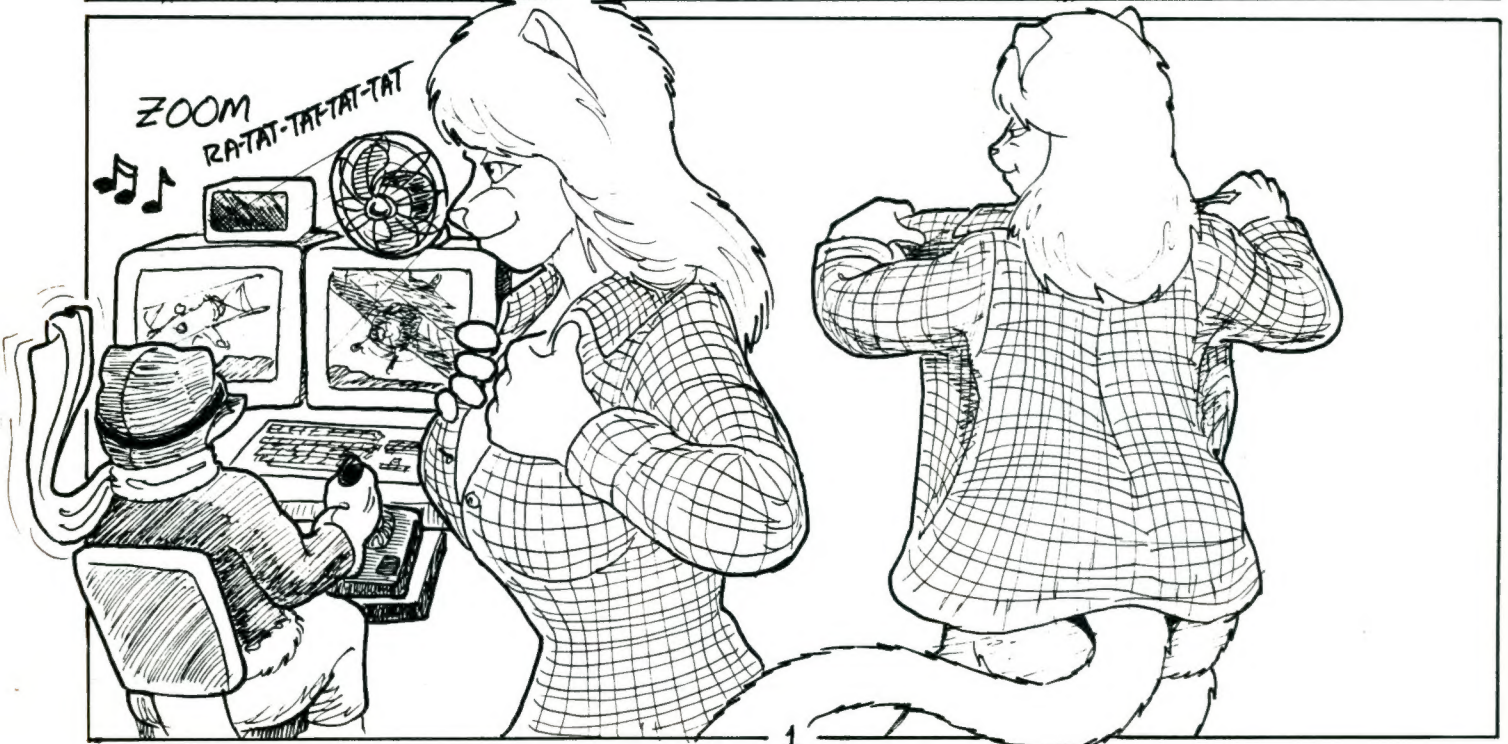
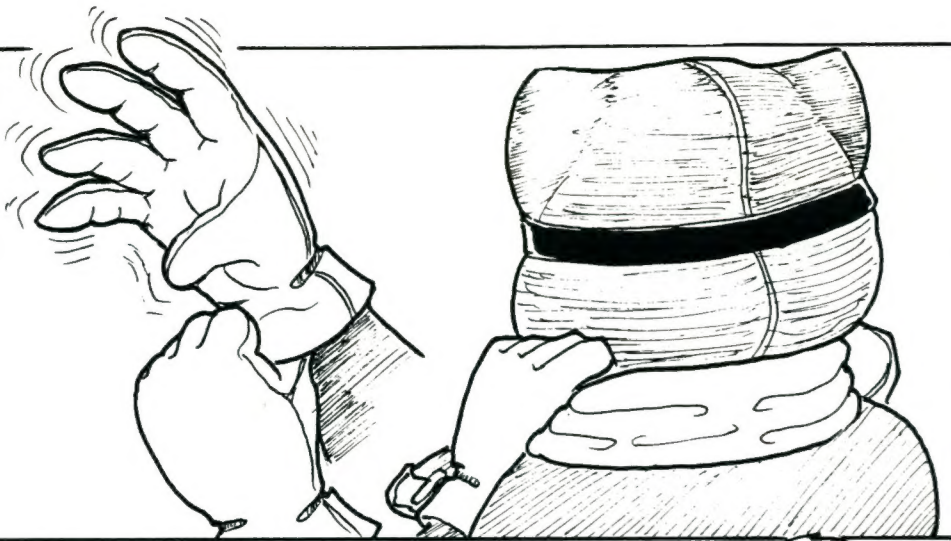


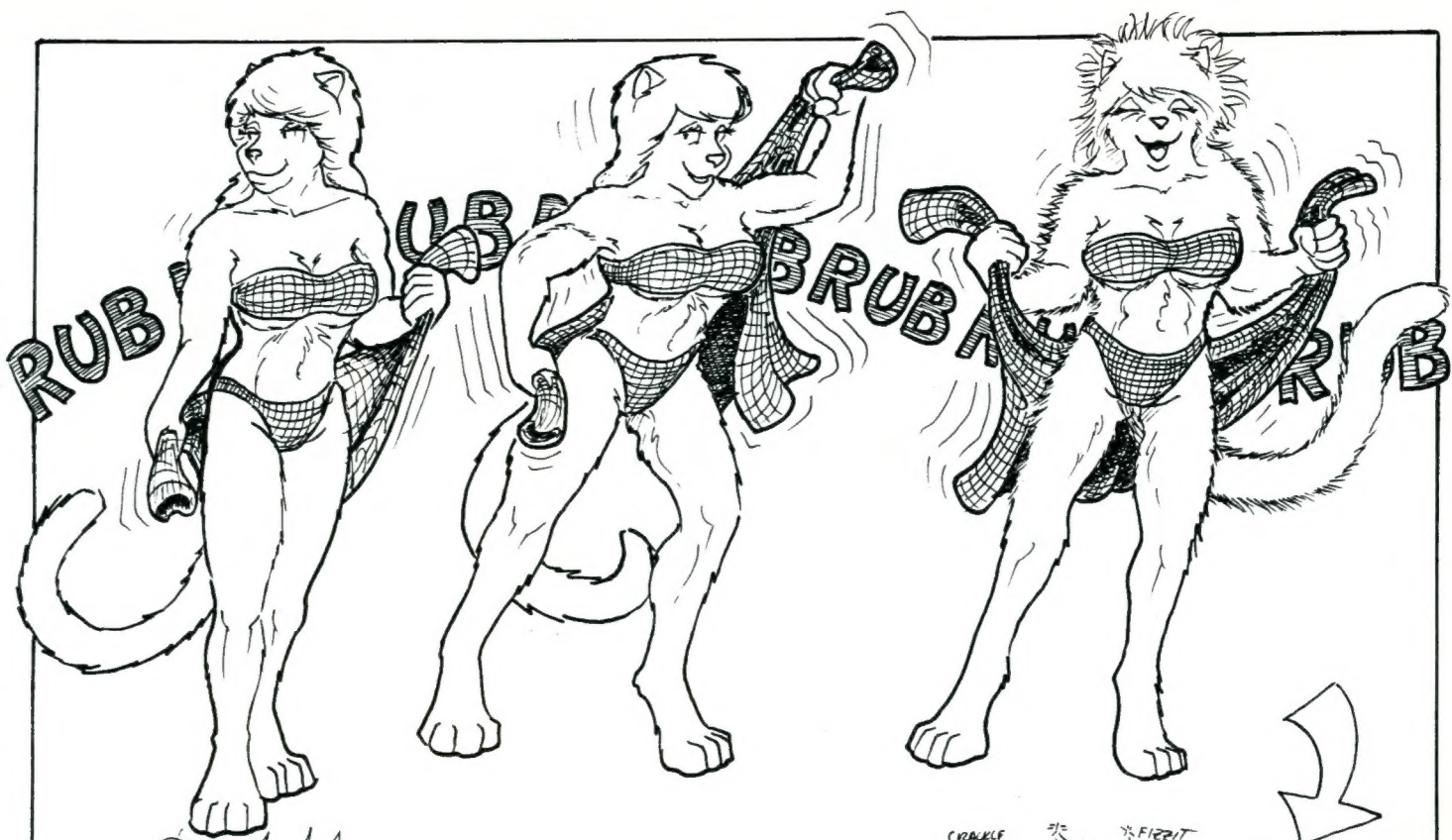
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A GIFT OF FIRE, A GIFT OF BLOOD

PART 4

by Watts Martin
illustrated by Zjonn

Memory!
You have the key.
The little lamp spreads a ring on the stair.
Mount.
Put your shoes at the door, sleep, prepare for life.

— T. S. Eliot, *Rhapsody On a Windy Night*

Her voice was quiet, the glow in her eyes more melancholy than fierce. She had only been in prison a week, but Mika knew she hadn't really eaten since almost a week before that. Even so, he wondered if the loss of freedom, of flight, wasn't more painful than the prospect of starvation was for Revar.

The bat's gaze sharpened slightly, with a touch of impatience, and he realized he hadn't answered her question. "Yes. Uh, well, he said he'd keep them for another week, but he didn't think I'd be able to sell either one in this market. He thought I should go to Raneadhros."

"I wish I could join you," she replied softly. "And you, if you go with him," she said to Dahlu. She picked at the wire mesh separating her from them with the claws of two fingers.

Mika smiled awkwardly. She knew he had no intention of leaving here. Dahlu looked worried, uncomfortable; he was surprised she had come with him to visit the bat. "We couldn't get Scat to drop charges," he said. "I'm trying to get you some sort of... food."

She smiled thinly. "They're trying. They're giving me raw meat. I hate it. It doesn't have enough blood to do any good and it tastes awful."

"Is that all they'll do for you?" Dahlu asked.

"They refuse to throw me a derelict."

"Or a baby fox?" Mika asked. Revar laughed.

Dahlu looked at both of them, confused, then looked down. "I can't get your bail," she said.

"I know," Revar said, in the friendliest tone Mika had ever

heard her use toward his girlfriend. "But I know you tried."

"I don't know what else we can do. We can't get the trial moved forward—we can't get you out—we can't get food in here for you...." Dahlu's voice trailed off.

"Are you and Mika getting along, at least?"

Both cats looked up at Revar with expressions of surprise; Dahlu was the first to speak. "I don't know about that, either. I can't blame you for what's going on between us...."

"But you'd like to." A hint of mischievous fire sparked in Revar's eyes.

"Hurry up please, it's time," a Guard standing on the bat's side of the room said. Revar stood up, sighing dramatically; Mika stood up, pressing his hand to the mesh. She traced it lightly with one claw, making a soft rattling noise against the wire, and led the guard out of the room as if she were the one in charge. Mika stood up, sighed, and turned towards the door.

"What is going on between us?" Dahlu asked, still sitting. "I don't know whether you're just upset, or drifting away for good."

"Maybe we were never as close as we thought," Mika replied.

"Are we breaking up?" She rose to her feet, standing beside him, her lower lip trembling slightly.

"I hope not," he said, sighing again. "I don't know."

She walked past him out the door.

• • •
"I don't see how this helps."

Mika straightened his slouch and regarded the speaker. Too much light behind her for him to recognize her, but the voice was familiar. Sort of. "How what helps?"

"That," she said, gesturing with a brown-tinted paw towards his half-empty stein. She slid into the bench opposite his and

stared at him across the booth's table.

"Orlonda?"

"Close. I'm Tani. Her sister. She told me about you."

"She doesn't know me."

"Revar does."

Mika looked away, then down at his beer.

"We all know about you. At least a little. She really likes you, you know."

"Orlonda?"

"Revar," she said, sighing.

Mika looked up, brightening momentarily, then slouched again. "Who's 'all'?"

"Just us. And Don. The bartender."

"He doesn't like furries."

"What you mean? He's like a brother to us."

Mika furrowed his brow in confusion. Was Don the one with the eyepatch? He couldn't be. He was an asshole. He mentally shrugged and took another swig of beer.

"That's your third one. You've been here half the night."

"I've been here most of the day," he said. "It's my seventh. I didn't go in to work." He trailed off. "Maybe I should quit that...."

Tani reached across the table and yanked the mug from his hand. "Get a grip here, boy. We're Revar's only friends. Hell, I'm barely her friend. She scares me. But right now she needs people like you and me to not be sittin' gettin' our whiskers doused."

"I've tried everything I can," he said, sitting up. "And I don't see any of you doing anything more."

"You try to raise her bail?"

"By what? Taking up a collection here?" He snorted. "You tell me you're the closest friend Revar's got behind me and Orlonda, and you don't like her."

"I don't want her to die, though." She slammed back half of what was left in Mika's stein. "It's like this, right? She doesn't get to a lot of blood real soon, she dies. She can't make it until her trial?" He nodded negatively. "Then we get her trial date moved up."

"We can't."

"Get charges dropped?"

Mika laughed bitterly. "Oh, right. Convince Scat of that. She got him where it hurts most."

"I heard about that." She grinned. "An evil place to grab a man."

"Not what I mean. That'd only hurt for a few hours. But his ego still hasn't recovered."

"So we need to talk to him."

"I've tried that."

"Three are harder to ignore than one. All of us go."

He snorted again, staring at his purloined beer stein.

Tani's idea didn't work, of course. It ended up being just two of them, Orlonda and Mika; Orlonda had no idea where her sister had gone, and Mika never saw her again. It was late evening by the time he tracked the fox down the next day and went uptown to Scat's flat, several blocks away from Dahlu's home.

"Look, I don't give a shit how much you like her. Or how much you don't like me. I already told you I'm not dropping charges."

"They wouldn't be holding her at all if it wasn't for you and the damn mouse convincing the guard she was too dangerous to go on her own recognizance," Mika said. "The bail you got from them was ridiculous."

"It's standard for criminals with violent tendencies. Frankly, I'm surprised they're holding her in a minimum security station at all. If you're asking me to recant my testimony, save your breath."

"Fixing your pride worth killing her?" Orlonda said.

The bulldog hadn't invited them in; he turned his back on her and headed into the apartment, leaving the door open. "It's not like it's a capital offense, lady."

"But if she dies of starvation before the trial, she's just as dead." Mika strode after Scat into the kitchen.

"I've already heard that she killed somebody right in front of you. How many did she kill before that?" Scat proceeded to pour himself a drink.

"So you have the right to judge her?" the fox said, still in the doorway.

"I'm not judging her now," he replied, looking directly at her. "I'm just accusing her."

"She'll die!"

"She goes free, so does the next guy she doesn't take a liking to. Or maybe just the next guy she takes blood from. She hasn't done it in a while, she can't stop herself from sucking him dead. She said that herself."

He sat down with his drink and glared back at Mika, one arm folded across his chest. "You think that's callous? Maybe it is. If you were the next person she decided to kill—or the next person she drank a little too much from—you wouldn't."

"The charges will be dismissed at the trial anyway," Mika said. "You're just torturing her."

"I don't know about that," Scat said calmly. "The worst that could happen is me getting charged along with her, if you manage to convince the judge that I started it. I don't have a record, don't have a reputation for legal trouble, and come from a good family. I have some standing here. She doesn't. I'll be a lot more likely to get a suspended sentence than she will. Legally it doesn't matter if I started it; she finished it."

"You bastard," Orlonda said. She stood in the doorway a minute longer, then launched herself across the room at Scat.

He jumped out of the chair; she crashed into its back as he regained his balance. The fox whirled around to face him again, still in the chair. He stood in front of her, hands placidly by his side, and grinned. "Go ahead. I won't lay a finger on you."

"Let it go," Mika said.

Orlonda glared up at the bulldog a moment more, then sprang to her feet, pushed him away and walked to the cat's side.

"Anyway," Scat said, picking up his drink again, "if you're concerned about her starving, talk to the Guard."

"You know we've tried," the fox growled.

"Well, hell, I don't know. Look, maybe she'll go free. If she's as tough as she thinks she is, a little starvation isn't going to bother her that much."

Mika shook his head and walked to the door, motioning for Orlonda to follow. She stormed past him into the hallway, her anger an almost visible black cloud hovering over her tail.

"Have a pleasant evening," Scat said. "Close the door on your way out."

"When Revar gets out, I'm going to give her directions to your little apartment here," Mika said calmly. "I hope she hunts you down and kills you. Slowly. Have a pleasant evening yourself."

• • •

Prisoners were only allowed to have visitors once a week. By the time Mika returned for his second visit, Revar had been in for two weeks, half the time until her trial. It had only been two days since Mika had been there; the day after the last ill-fated attempt to get the chargest dropped, he and Jack had tried, once again, to find some way to get food to the bat. Jack claimed one of the Guards owed him a big favor—something about saving his life during a border skirmish a few years back—but there were no strings to be pulled. Bringing in someone for her to attack was out of the question, of course, and the Guard couldn't get Revar released on her own recognizance, or on Jack's, for even a few hours.

The station's waiting room was obscenely cheerful, with a spotless brown shag carpet perfectly complemented to the plush furniture, pleasingly lit by the soft glowplates in the ceiling. A counter ran the length of the room down the middle; behind it, the carpet stopped, and a more mundane, businesslike array of desks and files stretched back to the far wall and the large door, almost always propped open, that led into the prison. The Guard that Mika had just spoken to made a beeline for this door, stopping at the desk just behind it and exchanging inaudible questions and answers with the cold-looking human female who sat there.

After far too long, the Guard returned to the counter, heading towards the lower left end so he could see over it. "I'm sorry," he said, his naked tail flicking violently, "that detainee is no longer able to accept visitors."

"What?" Mika reached across the counter, almost grabbing the rat's lapels and lifting him over it.

"She has been moved to solitary confinement," he replied, his tone apologetic. "There was a fight of some sort yesterday..." He started flipping through the papers the desk guard had given him.

"Was she hurt?"

"Hm? No. Not seriously. She did attempt to rip out the throat of one of her fellow inmates, and broke the arm of a third who tried to pull her away."

Mika closed his eyes, cursing inwardly. "I told you this was going to happen."

"Excuse me, sir?"

"The day before yesterday. I said she needed food. I've been saying that since she got here."

"That's no excuse. And we're doing the best we can."

"By locking her away from everything? Is there even a window where she is now?"

"There's one in the door." The rat's face registered confusion, along with considerable annoyance. "Sir, what do you expect us to do? The Empire frowns on breaking laws. Honestly, I don't want to know what the reaction would be if the Guard

allowed an assault to help someone who wouldn't be here if she hadn't assaulted someone to begin with."

Mika let out a long, drawn-out sigh, trying to keep his voice level. "They also frown on letting prisoners die through Guard negligence."

"We are doing all we can to keep that from happening—"

"You couldn't bring her an animal, —anything?"

"I believe that's been tried, sir. Evidently—" the guard tried unsuccessfully not to shiver—"it wasn't enough for her."

"Did you try a *big* animal?"

"How long have you lived here, sir?"

"All my life."

"Then you may be aware the native meat-bearing animals in this area are cold-blooded, and from what we know of her species, they won't do her any more good than small warm-blooded ones would."

"What about—what are they called—cows?"

"The only cows in this city are cow steaks, sir. Cows are big, stupid, smelly animals that require four or five times the grazing land any reptile, even an igla, would."

"We're trying," the rat continued, speaking more quickly, "to—ahem—requisition a cow. But under the best of circumstances, it won't be here for five days, and quite frankly, it may take longer to work around the animal abuse laws than it will to get a cow here from Raneadhros."

"What about prisoner abuse laws?" Mika glared at the Guard. "How is she now?"

"I don't really know—"

Mika grabbed the sheaf of papers and shook them. "In all of these, not one line is about her medical status?"

"I said *I don't know*." The rat yanked the papers back from him and rifled through them again. "I'm afraid I can't help you with that, sir," he said after a moment, putting the papers under the counter.

"Because you're afraid I'll get angrier if you tell me how bad she's doing?"

"Because it's against Guard policy."

"It isn't if your prisoners are doing well."

The rat hesitantly nodded agreement, then looked down. "If your—friend—hadn't broken the law, she wouldn't be here, sir. We are trying to get her non-sapient food, but for what you seem to be asking—even if it is truly what she requires—

our hands are tied."

Mika stared at the Guard dumbly, who looked up at him after a moment and silently turned and walked away. Then the cat turned around and ran out of the building.

"I'm coming, I'm coming," he finally heard. "You'll knock the bloody door down that way." Mika stopped pounding on the door and waited.

The sound of tumblers turning came from the door, then it opened, with Jack standing behind it surrounded by the aroma of brewing tea. "Why, hello, M—"

"How well do you know that Guard friend of yours?"

The fox blinked, scratching his chest fur. "You're going to want me to do something that'll require putting my shirt on, aren't you? Come in."

Mika closed the door behind him, sitting down on a low backless chair, more a thick, wide cushion with chair-like pretensions. "Well. How well do I know Verell? Like I said before, pretty damn well. If there was any way to get Revar some food, he'd have done it for me. I can see his point, of course. Can't bloody well look the other way if she goes after a fellow jailbird."

"She did, and they didn't," Mika said. "She's in solitary now."

Jack paused pouring his tea. "Oh, that's not good. Not good." He sat down beside the cat, the half-filled cup temporarily forgotten. "I thought she was able to keep herself from attacking people like that."

"She is. She can't stop taking blood once she starts, but she won't start involuntarily. And she knew what the consequences would have been, even if she had been successful."

"Then she must have been pretty desperate." He rocked back on his cushion, leaning against an imaginary wall.

"We're going to have to get her out. Now."

"Mika, we've gone over...." His voice trailed off, stopped by an uncharacteristic edge in the cat's tone. "Bloody hell. I may be adventuresome in the tea party set, kitty cat, but there are adventuresome things and then there are highly illegal, insanely dangerous things."

"You don't have to help, except for getting Verell to do it."

"Oh, that's all."

"There are a lot of Guards in that building. As long as he's careful, nobody will know he was the inside man."

"Except for getting her outside."

"We'll have to take care of that."

"So much for me not helping, then." He stood up abruptly, finished filling his cup of tea, and started to drink it, still standing. "That leaves us the problem of how to get in and get out, with an extra person, who happens to be a prisoner."

"Not if Verell gets her outside," Mika said. "He could get her to the back gate. Hell, there are dozens of gates in that building. A stupid gate, like a maintenance door. The kitchen. Or the courtyard. They exercise prisoners there or something, right?"

"Bloody hell," Jack said again. "I don't think I can go along with something like this, Mika. Helping a friend, trying to pull a few strings, that's one thing, but—"

"If you don't, she dies. It's that simple."

Jack sighed and poured himself another cup of tea without speaking, and without offering a cup to Mika. He finished the cup in a few minutes, still in silence, looked at the cat again, then went into the bedroom and came out carrying his shoes and shirt.

• • •

"There's got to be another way to do this," Jack grunted.

"Quit bitchin'", Orlonda snarled. "Sometimes ya gotta—"

"Look," Mika whispered loudly, silencing both of them.

The three crouched in front of a tall iron fence that bound a small courtyard behind the jail. Verell had informed them that all prisoners were allowed outside once a day, under supervision. Prisoners in solitary were not given recess in the company of other inmates, but they were still given a short time out from under the stone roof of the station.

Verell had come out, but Revar was nowhere to be seen. Except for the Guard, the courtyard was empty. Shortly, another Guard came out, and Verell wandered, seemingly without purpose, in the direction of Mika and company.

"Duck," Jack said, moving back behind the bushes at the base of the fence; it was evening, and luckily both Guards were human, neither able to locate their presence by smell. The other Guard followed Verell into the hearing range of the three outside the fence.

"...rather relieved," the second Guard was saying. He took out a cigarette and lit up.

"So they've given up?" Verell replied.

"Who knows, man. But she's not gonna appreciate being out here any more than being in the box at this point."

"Unless moving them is life-threatening, all prisoners get at least fifteen minutes outside. It's in—"

"I know, I know." He looked at Verell with an expression of mock exasperation. "So you're gonna stick me with taking her out."

"Well, look on the bright side. You probably don't have to watch her too closely."

"No shit." He took a long drag on the cigarette, then dropped it to the ground and stomped on it. "If she dies on my shift because you're makin' me follow the Charter and babysit Miss Living Dead, I'm gonna be pissed." He headed back towards the building.

"Need any help?"

"Why bother?" He disappeared. Verell paced a few steps, then stood in place self-consciously.

Jack glanced up at the top of the fence, then pulled out a rope with a small loop at one end, stood up, tossed it over the top of one of the fence's poles, yanked it tight, then crouched down behind the bush again.

"Isn't that kind of obvious?" Mika said.

"Only if you're looking for it. And we need to have as much set up as possible."

The door opened again, and the Guard stepped out, gently leading Revar. Her arm was around his shoulder, but only because he was holding her hand in place with his own. Her body dragged limply; it was hard to tell if she was even walking under her own power.

"There you go," he said, unhooking her arm from his neck. She staggered and started to fall; he gently lowered her to the ground, pushing her legs into a cross position. She sat and stared in the direction he had pointed her. Verrell made no moves, looking even more self-conscious than before.

"Worse than I thought," the second guard said, kneeling down beside her. "Can you hear me?" Revar's eyes moved slightly in his direction. "A week ago you'd have been trying to rip my throat out." His voice held unexpected pity.

She whispered something slowly, painfully, that only the Guards could hear. The one by her laughed; she bared her fangs at him, then turned back towards the fence.

"You know," he said, getting up and turning towards Verell, "there were probably medical orders not to move her."

"This might do her some good," Verell replied, walking towards the door. "Weren't you have supposed to cuff her wrists?"

"Why? So she doesn't fly away?"

"You know," Verell said suddenly, "you never struck me as the type who'd feel sympathy for a bat."

"This is a bitch of a way to go. Even for a bitch."

Verell laughed hesitantly, then went into the building.

"Now what?" Orlonda whispered.

"Keep waiting," Jack said. "You still with us, Mika?"

The cat nodded dumbly, unable to take his eyes off Revar's crumpled form.

Minutes passed by; the Guard stood by the door, slowly smoking his cigarette, glancing over at Revar every few seconds. After the first few minutes of silence, Revar wrapped her wings around her torso and stared up at the sky.

The door to the station opened and Verell poked his head out, saying something unintelligible to the guard. "Shit," the guard said clearly, disappearing into the building after Verell.

"Here we go," Jack said. Mika sprang up and grabbed the rope. "I hope you have some idea of what to do with her after we get her to the park. Assuming we make it," the fox continued.

But the cat was at the top of the fence before Jack had finished the sentence, swinging the rope over to the other side as he jumped down, landing with a *whuff*.

"Come on," Orlonda said, gesturing wildly. Mika quickly crossed to Revar, picking her up in his arms. She was frighteningly light. She started to squeak when he grabbed her, but he put one hand over her mouth. The bat started to bite, the sharp teeth slicing into his hand even with almost no strength behind them.

"It's me," he hissed. She stopped biting before drawing blood and looked at him; he had no time to look back, jumping onto the fence before he grabbed the rope. When he got to the top, he lowered her—as gently as he could—into Jack's arms, unhooked the rope from the fence and leaped down.

"And they're off," Jack said, a note of glee in his voice. All three of them made a mad dash away from the station, Jack bearing Revar's weight almost effortlessly.

"Mika?" Revar whispered.

"I'm here," he said, glancing over at her as they ran. Pus collected at the corner of one of her eyes, and her nose was running, discoloring the fur down to her muzzle. Mika winced and took one of her hands, running alongside Jack.

After what seemed like hours of running, they were at the closed park. Orlonda pulled out a small ball and placed it on the lock; when she stepped back, the ball exploded with a silent flash, taking the lock with it. She produced a new lock, identical in appearance to the old one, from where the ball had come from, placing it in the hole left by the original.

Jack handed Revar to Mika. "Okay, it's been about six minutes. Verell's little crisis should only have lasted five, so they know she's gone. They probably won't search the park, but they'll be in the area within another five minutes or so."

Orlonda put a restraining hand on the cat as he started inside. "Your idea was for Revar to take off for elsewhere tonight, wasn't it? She'd fly off and you'd use the rope to get out of the park, and let them figure out why the key doesn't work in the morning?" He nodded. "So what are you gonna do? You didn't know she'd be that bad."

"I'll think of something," he said, stepping inside and pushing the door closed.

"You forgot the rope, idiot," Jack said, tossing it over to him. "As soon as you get out, come to my house. It's about two hours before midnight now. If you're not there by an hour past eight chime, I'm coming back looking for you."

"Great," came Mika's muffled response.

"You know we likely to get two dead idiots this way instead of one," Orlonda said to Jack as they jogged away. "Or four live idiots in jail."

He grinned. "It's a minimum security prison. People break out all the time. They're used to it. Besides, it's obvious Revar couldn't have been in on it."

"Three idiots."

Inside the park, Mika carried Revar to the fountain and guided her gently to a sitting position beside him. He realized he had still forgotten the rope; it lay just inside the park's door. The bat's condition seemed much worse than he had hoped, though; if it was, he might not need the rope again.

"Stupid," she whispered after a few moments, trying to smile. "Now... escapee... 'stead of just assault."

"We've got to get you somewhere else. I was expecting you to be able to fly."

"Can't walk." She coughed wrackingly and squeezed her eyes shut, holding her stomach with one hand.

"Can we get you to Raneadhros? It's about four days journey away on land, maybe three if—"

"I would go... if I could," she whispered. "Love. I'm dying."

He stared at her dumbly.

"I won't... last the night. Maybe not... hour." Her voice trailed off, fainter than before.

"Dammit, you're not going to die. We can—"

"Shh," she said, resting her head against his chest. "We can't. Hold me."

Mika did, shaking violently.

"Remember... first time here?" Her voice dropped back down to a bare whisper. "Told you my life would... probably... pretty short." She closed her eyes. "Wanted to go out... more grandly."

"Dammit, stop!" He jerked to his feet, pulling her with him. She looked up in irritation, eyes half-lidded. "We can—I don't know—outside here, there's got to be something—somebody, even—"

"No," she said again. "Look." Mika was supporting her entire weight; he realized she was right. Even if the Guard—who were surely in the area by then—could be avoided, she couldn't catch anything.

"Hold me," she repeated, more softly.

Mika collapsed to the ground, pulling her into his lap. She hugged him weakly, resting her head against his chin and closing her eyes again. Her breathing grew more relaxed; Mika started to panic, wondering if that meant she was beginning to fade. He started to cry and hugged her tightly, hands pressed into her soft wings.

She stopped moving, and he couldn't tell if she was breathing or not. He blinked, losing sight of her through his tears for a moment. Then he slowly breathed in, trying to calm himself. He had thought about what to do if it came to this. He shook the bat roughly.

"If you got some blood, could you fly out of here?"

"Don't know," she said without opening her eyes. "So... weak..."

"But you'd survive the night. And longer. You'd have a chance of getting your strength back so you could go—hunting—again?"

She smiled; the effort looked painful. "I... take more than a small animal. Or small derelict."

Mika stroked her wing. "I know." He pulled her away from him, then pressed her chest along his own, tilting his head back and pressing her muzzle against his neck.

Revar stiffened, her eyes growing wide, then struggled. "No," she said, gasping.

"Do it," he said.

"I can't." She turned her head away.

He pulled back, trembling. Then he took out the knife he had used to cut the rope and laid the blade against his throat. "Its teeth or yours," he whispered.

She screeched, pulling at the knife. "Stop!" she said as loudly as she could.

"If you don't drink what comes out, then it really will go to waste." He closed his eyes, steeling himself.

With all her strength, Revar grabbed his arm and pulled; it was enough to move the blade away from his fur. "Bleed to death," she gasped.

"With the knife, yes." He lowered the knife and looked at her expectantly.

"Not just... you know I can't...." She looked back, eyes sad and accusing. "Don't... make me do this. I love you."

"You've given me more than I could put into words, love," he whispered. "This is what I can—what I have to—give back." He pulled her close and kissed her mouth gently, then guided it to his neck again.

Her lips were open against his fur forever, time standing in place, her breath hot, the occasional touch of her tongue hotter still. Tears ran down her face freely, her eyes closed, her heartbeat and the sensual movement of the almost-kiss the only signs that Revar was yet living. Her lips opened wider, and he felt pinpricks pushing through his fur to rest against the skin. He stroked the length of her spine gently, encouraging; she sobbed out loud, then bit.

Pain shot through Mika; he realized that she wasn't strong enough to bite through at once, and he froze as she chewed slightly, sending more lances of pain across him. He wondered if it would have been this painful when she was in good health.

The pain didn't go away after a few seconds like he had hoped; instead, it was joined by a dull throbbing. The blood flowed freely, but he couldn't tell if Revar was drinking. It was too late now anyway. He held her and leaned back in the grass until he was prone, with her stretched on top. If someone had walked by at that point, he would have thought the two were making love. Mika held her as tightly as if they truly were, and moved his hand down her back, pressing one of her arms against her sides, caressing the base of her spine.

She moved slightly, and he felt her tongue flick around the wound, then in and out of it. It occurred to him that he could hear her drinking him down; he shivered under her, pushing back his own survival instinct.

After a few minutes, it was easier to ignore the pain, and the sounds, and even the stars. He closed his eyes, lying still. When he opened them again, it was hard to tell the difference. Wasn't sight one of the first senses to go?

He realized she had been at him far longer than she had been at the derelict he had seen her attack. Of course, she had been telling him that she couldn't control how much she took all along; he had hoped that this time, she might have been wrong. Mika was annoyed by people who were always right. He passed his remaining time watching the light go away, star by star.

“And, are we feeling like the Eighth Hell today?”

The room—if it was a room—came slowly into focus, a field of white surrounding the face of an obnoxiously cute female otter. All otters were obnoxiously cute.

“I’ll take that as a yes,” the otter continued. “If so, it’s a marked improvement.”

Mika turned his head slightly, to see Dahlu sitting to his left. She looked like she had been crying. There was another fuzzy, foxlike form behind her.

“About bloody time,” the foxlike form said, resolving itself into Jack. “You’ve been out three days.”

Mika lifted a hand to his neck and extended one finger. It encountered a mass of bandages.

“You can explain that later. But you probably won’t. Nobody else will,” the otter said. She stomped out of his range of vision.

“I’m not dead?” Mika finally said.

“No such luck,” Jack said. “I knew you’d screw things up

in the park, though. We hadn’t come back to find you, they would have had quite an interesting corpse on their hands when they opened the park. After they got the locksmith, of course.”

“Revar?”

Jack sighed. “We got her, too.”

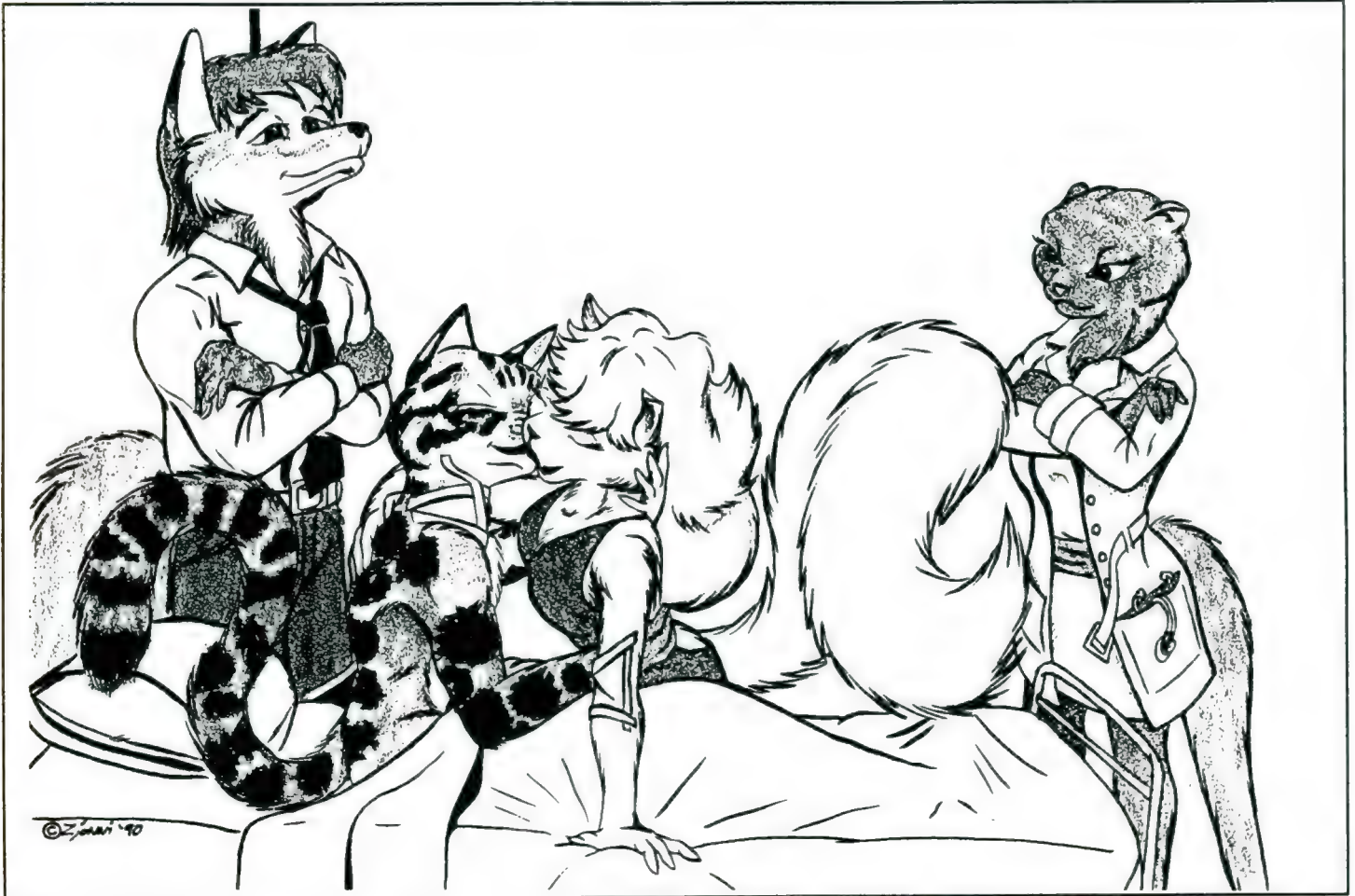
“Alive?”

“Quite. And quite distraught. She wouldn’t speak to us, fought us on the way back to my house. She was in—and probably still is—a pretty terrible state, and I’m not speaking physical. When I got back the next evening, she was gone.”

“What? Where?”

“Don’t know. She barely said a dozen words to me. Three of them were, ‘I loved him.’ Actually, those may have been all twelve.” The fox sighed. “I think I know what happened in that park, but don’t fill me in on the gory details, mate.” He paused. “You’re pretty brave for an idiot.”

“Idiot,” Mika repeated, leaning back in his pillow and smiling wistfully. “Yes. I can’t even become a martyr right.”



"Well, as a bit of friendly advice, kitty, don't keep practicing."

"Does she... think she killed me?"

"She did kill you, mate."

Mika struggled to a sitting position, looking at the fox with a puzzled expression.

"You barely had enough blood to stay clinically dead until we got you to a hospital. Did you know you have a rare blood type? You can only get transfusions from cats, and only about a quarter of those. They had enough here to keep you clinically dead."

"Then...."

In answer, Dahlu raised her arm. It had a thick bandage around it. Mika stared at it, then back at Jack.

"They say they took enough to be dangerous to her, too, mate—some of the doctors, including our otter friend there, thought Dahlu might die from trying to keep you alive. There are too many bloody martyrs in this room."

Mika smiled weakly, then leaned back on his pillow, pulling Dahlu into bed with him and kissing her as passionately as someone in intensive care is able to.

"By the way," Jack said as he left, "as far as I know, the jailbreak is still a mystery to the police. Considering your wounds look suspiciously like, say, a bat bite, you can be expected to get a sound grilling. Have fun."

• • •

"There's no reason for you to stay here. We could—"

"There's no reason for me to follow." Dahlu smiled sadly at Mika. "This is where my life is. I...."

"I'd still like to be part of it."

"You always will be." She looked at his backpack and the small carrying bag. "That's it?"

"That's it. And my portfolio."

"Of course." She hugged him again. The fight over his decision to move to Raneadhros had been fought two days ago, when he had first mentioned the idea—scarcely (as she put it) a day after he had left the hospital. Now there was only acceptance and regret. She had not really lost him to Revar, but she had lost him nonetheless. But she had known that when she saved his life.

The grilling Jack had promised had also come and gone. Charges of jailbreaking had already been filed by the state against Revar, with an automatic suspended sentence due to the circumstances of her physical condition. They tried to

link him to the break, but except for the bite there was nothing to link him to the bat that night at all, and that was only enough to make him a suspect.

"Did Jack get in touch with his friend?"

"He wrote him and warned him about me." He grinned. "He'll be looking him up on the trip. But so far, it looks like I'll have a room with him."

"How long is Jack staying there?"

"Just a week. Wezip doesn't have that much space."

"I hope he has enough for just you," Dahlu sighed. She and Mika kissed a final time; he slung his backpack over his shoulder, picked up the bag and his portfolio, and headed down the steps toward the road.

"Do you think you should be leaving so late?"

"Oh, it'll be fine. Nobody's out there this late; besides, nobody's going to bother somebody built like Jack. The temperature's nice. It's the perfect time to be traveling." He started down the road, joined by his lengthening twilight shadow.

"I'll always love you," she said softly.

"I love you, too," he said. He wondered if she meant it in the same way he did, or even the same way either of them would have used it two months ago. They had tried to build a relationship by taking friendship and strong physical attraction and naming it love. It was incredible it had lasted for so long; how many other "lovers" were even now doing the same? He shook his head slightly, as he had every time those thoughts had run through his mind in the past week, and started off.

Just before he left the range of her voice, Dahlu called to him again. "Do you think she'll be there?"

He paused and looked back. "Yes. I think so."

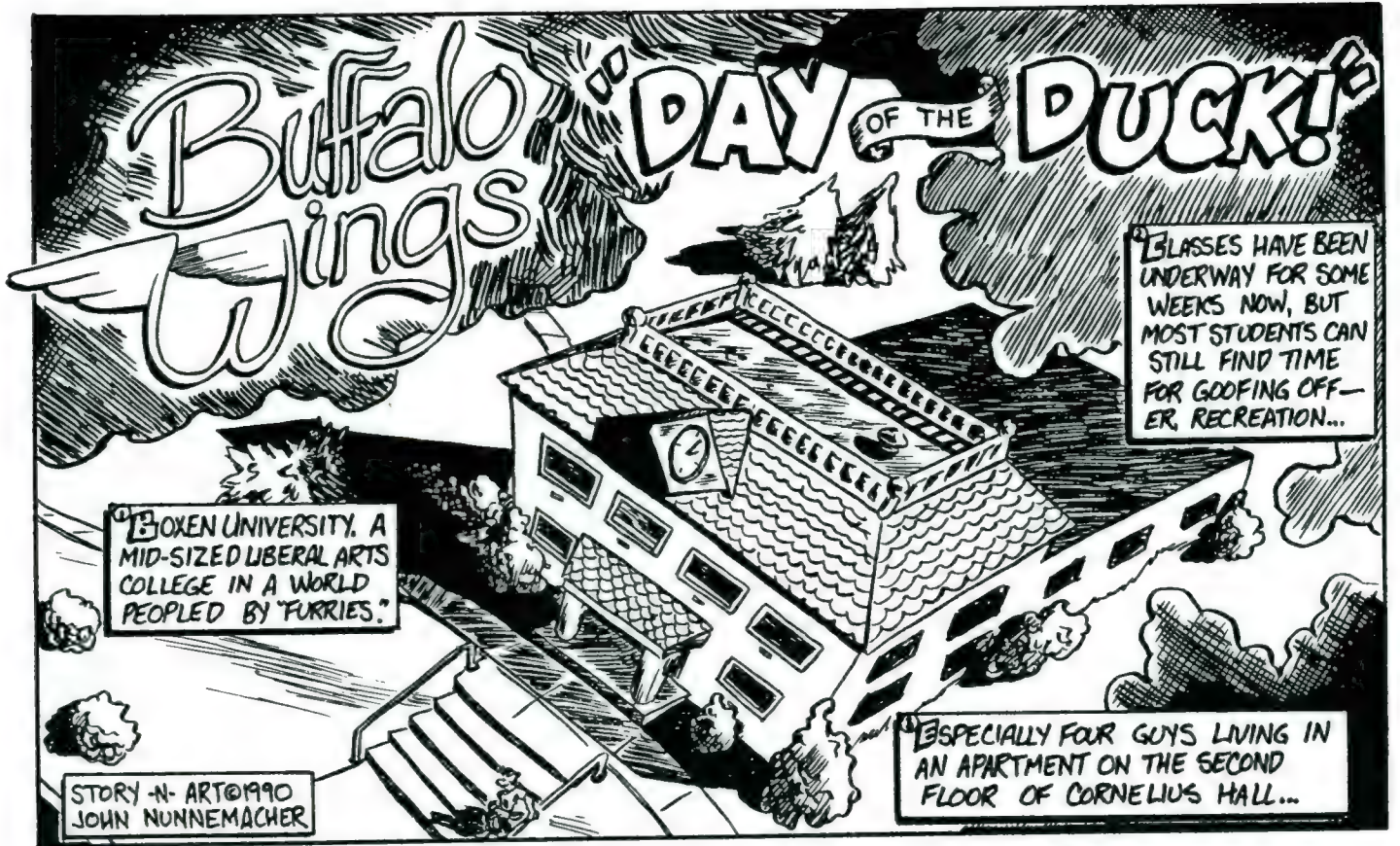
"I hope... you'll be happy together. If you find her. You will."

He smiled sheepishly and blew her a last kiss, then turned around, strolling towards the edge of town to meet the fox.

The breeze blew coolly through his fur, and the rising moon was almost full, its pale light shading the world in delicate blues. It was, indeed, a perfect time to be travelling. ☺

END.



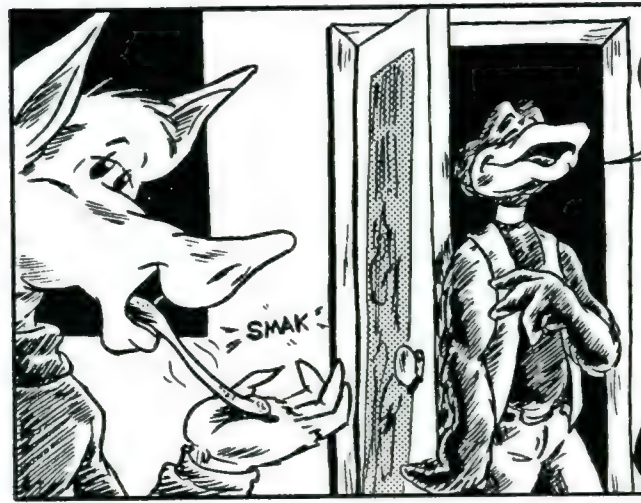


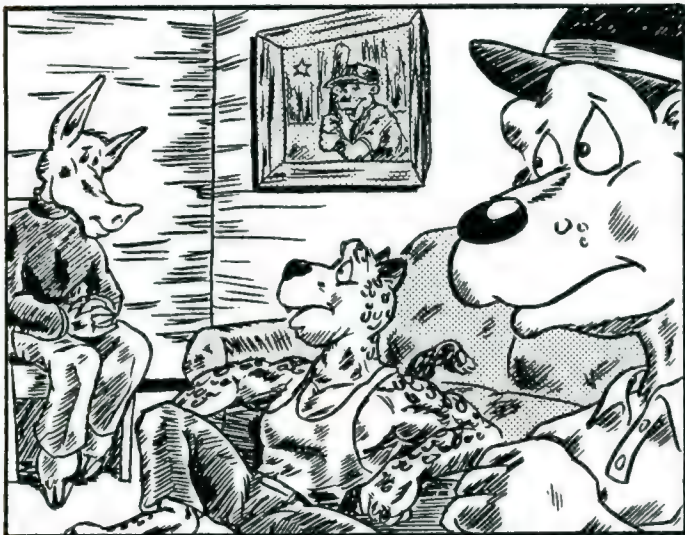
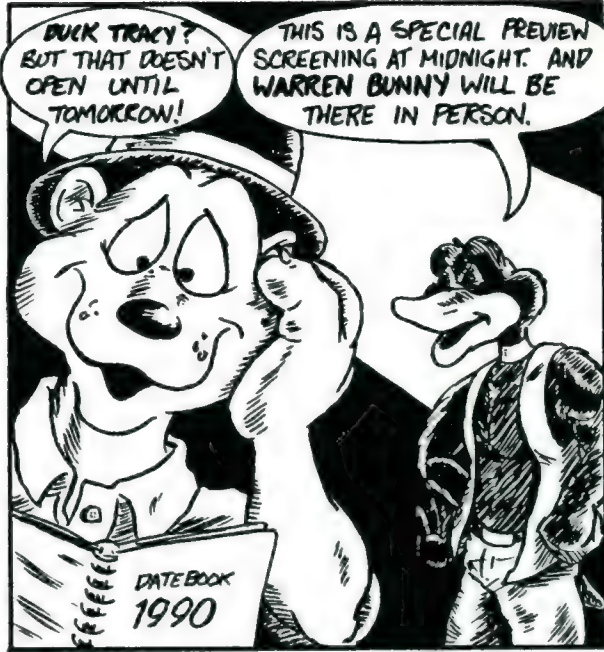
BOXEN UNIVERSITY. A MID-SIZED LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGE IN A WORLD PEOPLED BY "FURRIES."

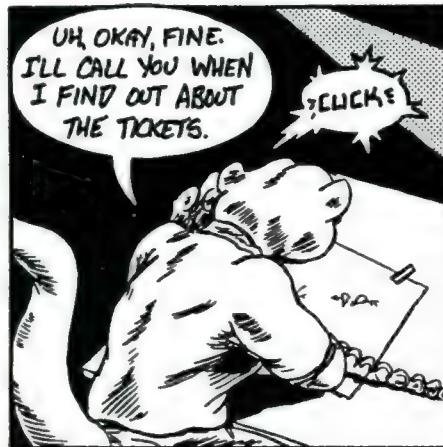
CLASSES HAVE BEEN UNDERWAY FOR SOME WEEKS NOW, BUT MOST STUDENTS CAN STILL FIND TIME FOR GOOFING OFF—ER, RECREATION...

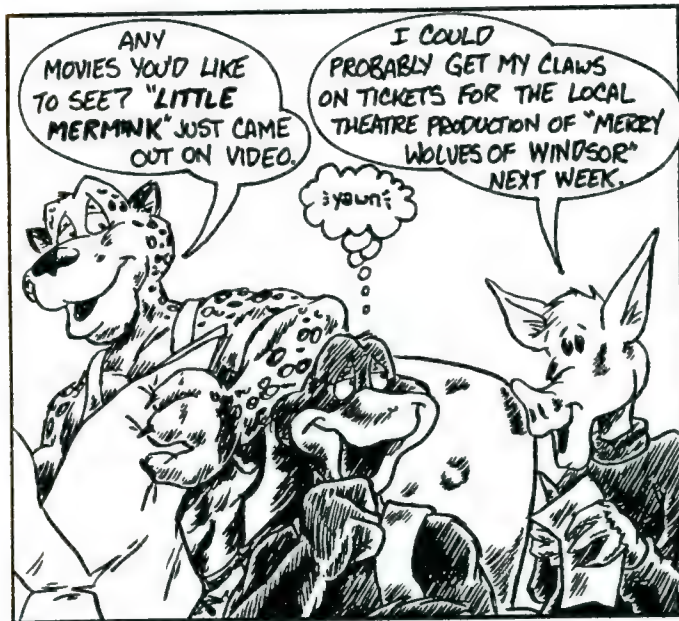
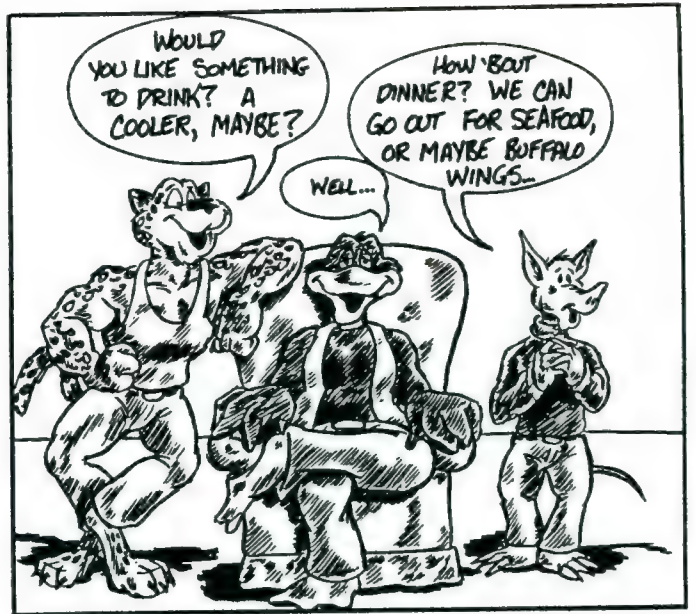
ESPECIALLY FOUR GUYS LIVING IN AN APARTMENT ON THE SECOND FLOOR OF CORNELIUS HALL...

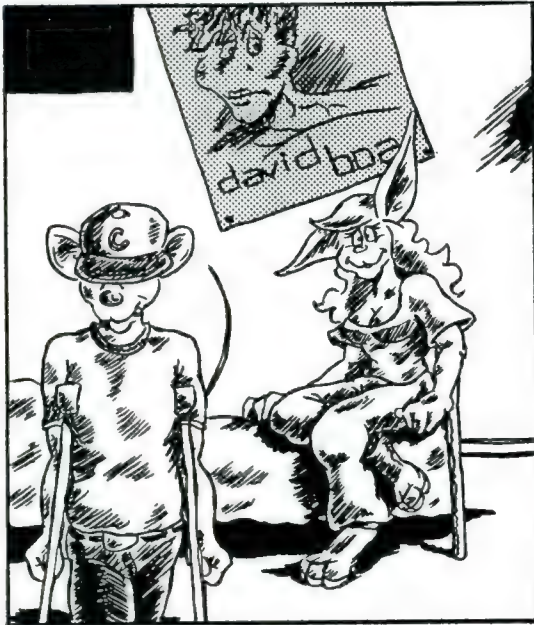
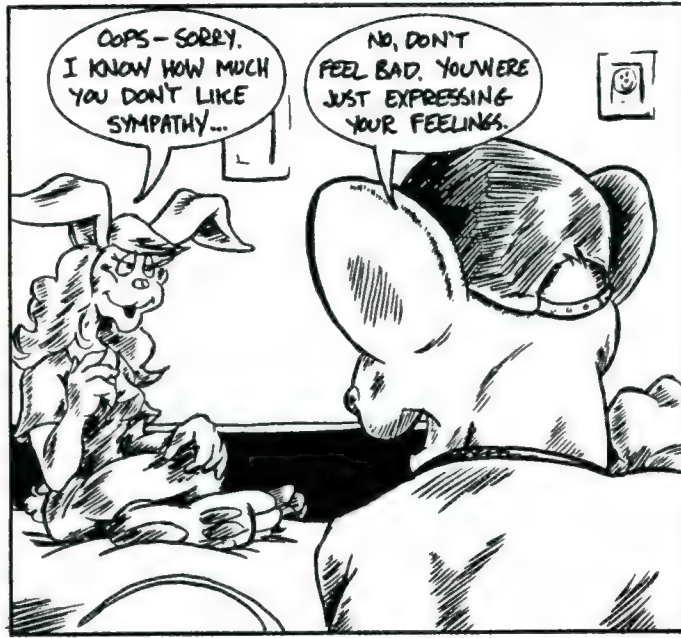
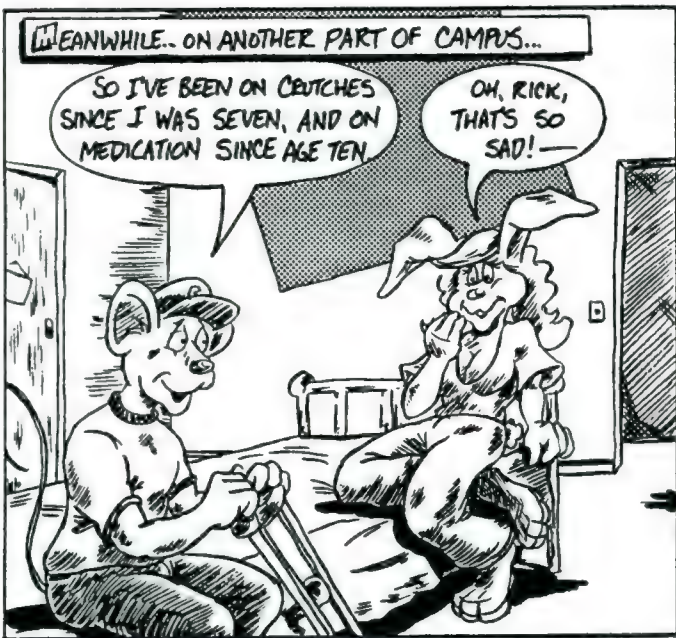
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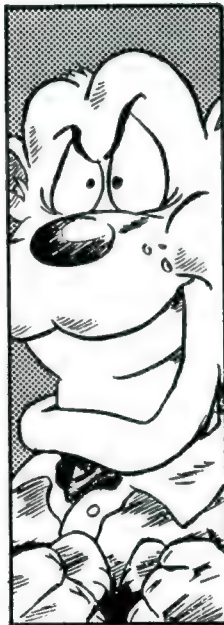
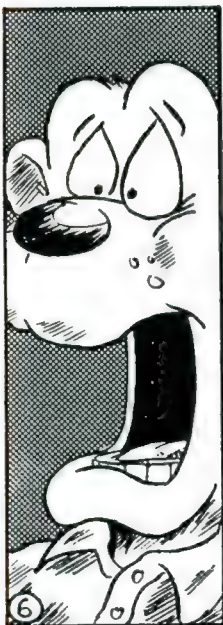
















ADAM VAN WEEK '90



Birthday Girl

by Lance Rund
illustrated by Eric Blumrich

I woke to the tickling sensation of someone's whiskers in my face. Opening an eye revealed my unexpected sleeping partner... Katherine, it seemed, had crawled into my bed sometime during the night and snuggled up to me. It was a habit I was trying to discourage, but how could I be angry at her, when all she wanted was to be close to me?

God, but she was cute. Gently I extracted myself from her embrace and sat up, looking at my still-sleeping companion. "Short, feisty, friendly and furry," was how I tended to describe her... and she was in fact all of those.

It was that last word - "furry" - that tended to throw people off. Genetic constructs were rare, and Katherine was unusual even for an "engineered life form". Everyone knew about the research which had yielded the pollution-eating bacteria, the hardy, disease- and drought-resistant food plants, and the modern livestock which could live in the most marginal land. And everyone knew especially well of the seemingly miraculous "lifeguard" cells which swam in the blood of humans, fighting off disease and cancer after being injected at an early age. "Symbiosis," said the scientists. What it meant was excellent health and lengthened life.

Katherine, though, was an "experiment" of a completely different kind. She, and those like her, were part-human, part-animal, their genes mapped out on the supercomputers around the world (a task I had helped accomplish). Her very existence was a consequence of the basic human genetic research which had led to the medical miracles. There were only a few thousand of these man-beasts, but I knew that would not last long.

As I watched her, she stirred, her paw-like hands reaching for me. I took her hand in mine, squeezing it gently. She opened her eyes, blinking against the sunlight coming in through the window. After a moment she rolled over onto her belly, crushing the pillow to her as she buried her face in it. I laughed at the sight.

"C'mon, Kathy, time to get up," I said as I tossed the covers off of her. She whimpered for a moment, making muffled sounds into the pillow. I reached over and grasped the pillow, tugging it from her. "You're missing your cartoons, you know."

"Mmmm..." she said as she rolled over onto her back. She stretched, making the joints in her arms, legs, and back pop. After a long moment she relaxed, wiping the sleep from her

eyes with the backs of her hands. She sat up, looking into my face, smiling groggily, then extended her arms to me, seeking a hug. I gathered her to me, holding her close as she rubbed her downy-soft cheek-ruffs against my throat and chest.

"Good morning, little lady," I said as I ran my fingernails up and down her spine. She squirmed in my grasp, making little pleasure sounds, then returned the favor with her claws, ever so gently.

"G'morning, Dave," she whispered in her soft, husky voice. Katherine's greatest achievement was her mastery of speech... she could speak almost as well as a human, though not nearly as loudly. Language skills were a stumbling block to nearly all of the so-called "furries", but Katherine had worked so hard...

I scooped her up into my arms, lifting her out of the bed as she wrapped her arms around my neck. At four-foot-eight and eighty pounds, she was full-grown, and easily carried. You couldn't say that about her ancestors - the four-hundred pound tigers which had once ruled the tropical forests of India.

She rested her head against my shoulder as we went into the kitchen. Once there, I put her down and opened the refrigerator. She reached for a can of soda, but I swatted her hand. "No," I said, "you know you can't have that. Makes you sick, remember?"

She held her smarting hand to her chest, a hurt look on her face as she pouted. "Tastes so good, though..."

"I know, I know, but there are lots of things that seem good when you do them, but hurt more afterwards." I took her hand in my own and kissed it. "I don't want you to get hurt, understand?"

She didn't look up, but answered with a meek "Yes..." I released her and got out a bottle of orange juice, pouring her a glass. She brightened immediately when I handed it to her. Holding the glass in both hands, she trotted off into the living room and plopped down in front of the television.

I knew she would be riveted to the screen for the next half hour. Shaking my head, wondering how she could stand that crap (and forgetting how I too had been addicted to cartoons), I headed into the bathroom for a shower.

Katherine didn't know it, but today was a special day for her. She still didn't have much of a concept of time, and though she understood what a calendar was, she just didn't know why it was so important. One day seemed pretty much like another to her, and she didn't understand what all the big deal was about. Therefore, it didn't occur to her that today was her seventh birthday.

Physically she was mature. If she hadn't been sterile, she could have had children by now... the thought of "babies having babies" came to mind, but I dismissed that as unfair. It was true that Katherine's intelligence was not quite that of a human, and it was true that she tended to act like an innocent, well-behaved child. These facts would not make her any less of a loving mother. I knew very well that Kathy... Kathy, not Katherine... that she had a seemingly endless capacity to love. And I, in return, loved her.

Those were troubling thoughts, though, and I put them from my mind as I rinsed the shampoo from my hair. Today was a day for celebration, not brooding.

Kathy was still in front of the television when I came back out into the living room. There was a half-eaten bowl of cereal next to her (she preferred it dry, no milk... bleah!) and the remnants of a peanut butter and tunafish sandwich (bleah again). She laughed as Screwball Squirrel clobbered yet another poor, dumb dog, then heard me and looked over her shoulder.

"Wanna watch 'toons with me?"

"Sure... move your furry butt over." She shifted, and I sat down next to her. She leaned against me, and we laughed away another half-hour munching on handfuls of dry Cocoa Puffs and watching animated mayhem.

The show finally ended, and I shoed her into her bathroom with instructions to take a bath and brush her teeth (she always had to be reminded of this, as she still had the inch-long canines which marked her ancestry). As she noisily splashed about in the water I took the opportunity to dress.

Kathy finally emerged from the bathroom, damp and looking bedraggled. She had her body brush with her, and looked hopefully up at me as she held it before her.

"Okay, honey, hold still..." I took the brush and started brushing her fur into order. Her fur was relatively long, and required attention daily. This was always a special shared moment between us... she would not allow anyone else to brush her. She put her hands out against the wall and leaned forward, her legs spread wide. Of course she didn't know that this was the position of someone being

frisked, or the effect it had on males.

Kathy purred just like a large cat as I worked my way across her back and legs, squirming especially energetically as her rump and tail were brushed. She turned around for me to brush her front, her eyes closed, her face in a wonderful expression of relaxation and pleasure.

I was almost done when the doorbell rang. She immediately ran for the door, heedless of her nudity. Before I could head her off she had opened the door, revealing my friend Rick. Thankfully he was used to Kathy's antics, and took her display in stride.

"Good morning, Uncle Rick, please come in," Kathy said as she stood aside for him. Her eyes were glued upon the brightly-wrapped box under his arm. Rick tousled the fur on her head as he entered.

"Hi, Kathy. How're you today?"

"Fine, thank you," she said as she closed the door behind him. "Whatcha got?"



Rick smiled, teasing her. "Oh, nothing interesting, I'm sure." Kathy nodded, but still stared at the box.

"Kathy, go get dressed... we're going out in a little while," I told her. She beamed at us, excited, then ran into her room. Rick laughed as she raced around the corner out of view.

"I must say, that's a sight to see... greeted by a lady tiger in the buff. She's got quite a figure on her these days, you know."

"Yeah, she does... I'm going to have to talk to her about being a bit more discreet. She answered the door like that last week, and sent a couple of religious solicitors screaming down the street. I was laughing too hard to be angry at her." I smiled and shook my head. "I guess the Bible doesn't have much to say about tiger girls."

Rick and I went into the living room, still talking as I cleaned up after Kathy's breakfast mess. Rick was a friend from my college days, before I'd graduated and joined BioMap as a programmer. He adored Kathy (it was hard not to, really), and she in turn was attached to him. She called him "Uncle Rick", and spent many an afternoon playing with his daughter and their dogs.

A few minutes later Kathy returned. She was wearing her bright-green skirt and a "Kimba" cut-off tee-shirt, with a white silk bow-ribbon tied at the base of her tail where it poked through the slit in the back of her skirt. She had her small handbag with her, and was bouncing impatiently up and down, itching to go.

"Shoes, little lady," I reminded her. She made a face, but plopped down and reached for her custom-fit shoes. Her legs were closer to human than animal, but she still was digitigrade, walking on her toes. She slipped them on, closing the velcro straps. I knew they weren't very comfortable for her, but if she were to fit into a human world she'd have to abide by human rules, including wearing shoes.

"Where are we going," she asked, fairly quivering with anticipation.

"Oh, I don't know," I said. "How about a trip to the library?"

She grimaced. "No fun."

"Okay, we'll have to settle for something else... how about Disneyland?"

She made a squeak of delight, and sprang up into my arms, kissing and nuzzling me. Kathy had never been to Disneyland, but had watched with enchantment the animation, and listened to the stories from the Magic Kingdom I read to her when she was younger. "Look," she would say as we watched Shere Khan from "The Jungle Book", "he's just like me..."

Rick made his goodbyes, expressing his regret that he

couldn't go with us. That was not the case, but he knew that today was special, between Kathy and me. He left, making Kathy promise not to open her present until after we got home. She kissed him, then jumped back into my arms, begging to go.

I tried to contain the wriggling furball in my arms. "Easy, girl, easy... settle down, and we'll go." With an effort she held still, and after a moment the we left, her furry hand in mine.

• • •

"One adult and one child, please," I said to the ticket booth clerk as I put my credit card down on the counter. The clerk smiled and began entering the transaction, then suddenly stopped as she saw Kathy peering over the counter. Kathy had been the center of attention all through the parking lot and the admission line, and she had soaked it up, delighting in all the attention.

"Hi," Kathy said to the clerk, demurely.

After a moment the clerk realized what Kathy was, and smiled at her. "Hello..." The clerk looked up at me. "I take it she's the 'child' here?"

"She's seven years old today... but we're both still kids, I'm afraid."

"Wow... happy birthday, my dear," the clerk said to Kathy. "I think we can let you in free today..." She handed Kathy a sticker with the letters "V.I.P." on it. "Here, put this on, you can get free ice cream in the park. Have fun today..."

"Oh! Thank you!" Kathy bounced up and down and attached the sticker to her shirt. I finished paying for my ticket, and we entered the Happiest Place on Earth.

Kathy's eyes were wide as we entered the park. She stared at everything and everyone... never in her life had she seen so many people all at once. She stayed right next to me, clutching my hand apprehensively as we walked down Main Street.

As we moved slowly through the crowd, Kathy was an unending stream of questions... "What's that?" "What's in there?" "Where are we going?" She pointed at everything, wanting to see everything at once.

I laughed, remembering my first visit to the park. It was no different for me, and I indulged her, letting her lead us to all the bright, fascinating sights and sounds.

We entered the plaza in front of Cinderella's Castle, and Kathy suddenly froze. I looked to see what had caught her attention, then I saw the costumed Tigger cavorting through a small cluster of people. She put her hand to her mouth, eyes wide open and shining.

"Do you want to meet Tigger," I asked. She nodded, but

didn't take her hand from her mouth. We went over to the performer. Kathy's hand was trembling in mine... even though she knew that there were others like her in the world, she had never met one. We approached Tigger, Kathy hiding behind me.

Tigger bounced over to me, then noticed the timid figure behind me. Apparently the person in the suit had seen "furries" before, because he didn't miss a step. He knelt down in front of Kathy, waving and hiding his eyes behind his hand. Around us, a crowd gathered.

Momentarily Kathy's outgoing nature reasserted itself, and she stepped forward, extending a hand to touch Tigger. He shied away, feigning fear, then held still while she touched the fur. In return he extended a finger and "beeped" her nose. Kathy squeaked, then leaped into Tigger's arms, making happy sounds of joy. Tigger caught her, hugging her and spinning around and around.

"Look, look! 'Nuther tiger, like me!" She beamed at me. I smiled... Kathy was having the time of her life. For a moment I felt a pang of jealousy at her innocent abandon, then I reminded myself that she was as "grown-up" as she was going to get. Seeing the world through her eyes, I felt my cynicism fading away.

"Love you, little lady," I whispered.

Darkness had fallen. Kathy was nearly exhausted, but pleaded to stay till late. I relented... it was her birthday, after all, and a special occasion. She would sleep like a log tonight, that was certain.

We sat down in the grass in the plaza, resting as we waited for the fireworks. Kathy's head was in my lap, and I was rubbing her shoulders gently. Her shoes were in a locker, soaked from repeated rides on Splash Mountain. Kathy loved the water. Her wet tee-shirt had certainly caught a fair amount of male attention, but she had not noticed. Someday soon she would know plenty about what boys wanted... with her looks and charming ways, she was extremely attractive... something I had noticed, and felt, all too well.

People kept staring at her as they passed. Kathy smiled back at them. Apparently being an object of curiosity did not bother her, but still it made her think of her uniqueness.

"How come there aren't more furries like me," she asked sleepily as a group of tourists took pictures of the two of us.

"Someday, soon, there will be," I told her. "But you're one of the first. The scientists are still learning how to make animals smart like you. It's not easy."

"Mmmmm..." She sighed, leaning into my massage. "Is that how come everyone's looking at me?"

"Yup. You're special. You're pretty, too... even if there

were a million furries, you'd still be special." I hugged her close. "You're so special to me..."

She turned her large, shiny eyes to me. "I love you. Want to be with you forever."

"I want that, too." Again, the disturbing thoughts rose within me, but at that moment the park loudspeakers announced the beginning of the fireworks, providing welcome diversion.

Kathy loved fireworks, and the Disney show was as good a performance as there was. She watched with rapt attention at the flashes and explosions of light. After the finale, she looked up at me, smiling warmly.

"Thank you, Dave. Today's been so much fun..."

"Anything for you, little lady," I replied. Slowly we got to our feet, then made our way back towards the entrance, heading towards home.

I closed the door behind us. She leaned against me, half asleep. I scooped her up and carried her into her room, laying her down on her bed. Gently I undressed her, draping her clothes over a chair. Her present from Uncle Rick would have to wait till tomorrow... she was too tired to care, though. I kissed her goodnight, but she held onto my hand as I turned to go.

"Wanna sleep with you."

I shook my head. "No, you're old enough to sleep by yourself. Be a big girl."

"But it's lonely. People sleep together all the time, why can't we?" She looked up at me, searching my face.

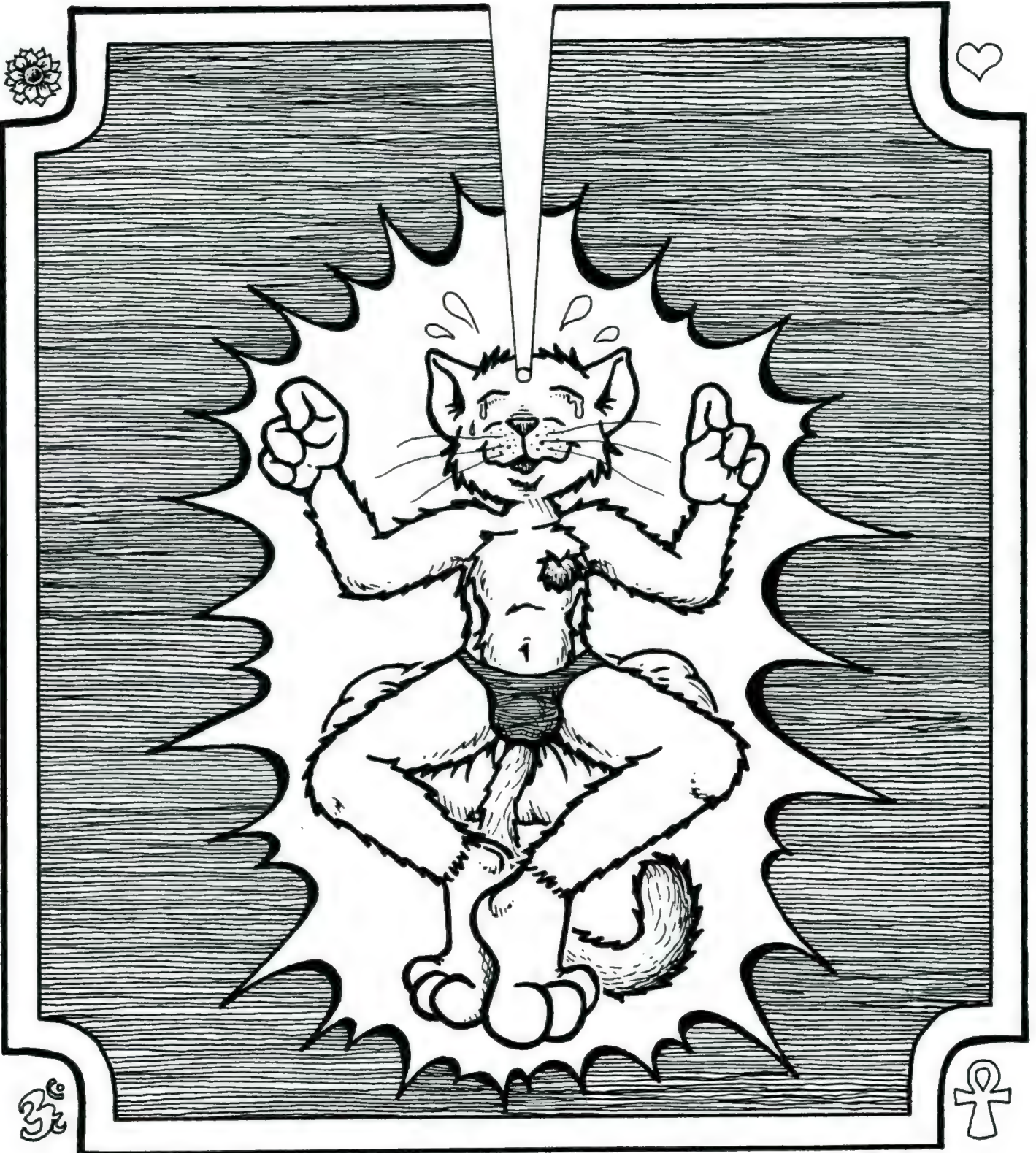
I hesitated, arguments about right and wrong, sexual connotations, and my growing distrust of myself and my own motivations forming in my head... and being rejected. She saw no wrong in it, in her innocence. And deep down, I knew she was correct. It was wrong that she should suffer emotionally because of my personal hang-ups.

"Okay, Katherine. Your wish is my command..." She held her arms up to me, and I carried her into my bedroom. She settled down in my bed as I undressed. I lied down beside her, wrapping my arms around her. Momentarily she was asleep. I envied her... she could rest peacefully so easily, her conscience free of guilt and worry.

After a few minutes, I too felt sleep overtaking me, Kathy's absolute trust calming my worries. Just before I fell asleep, I whispered into her ear, "I love you so much, little lady..."

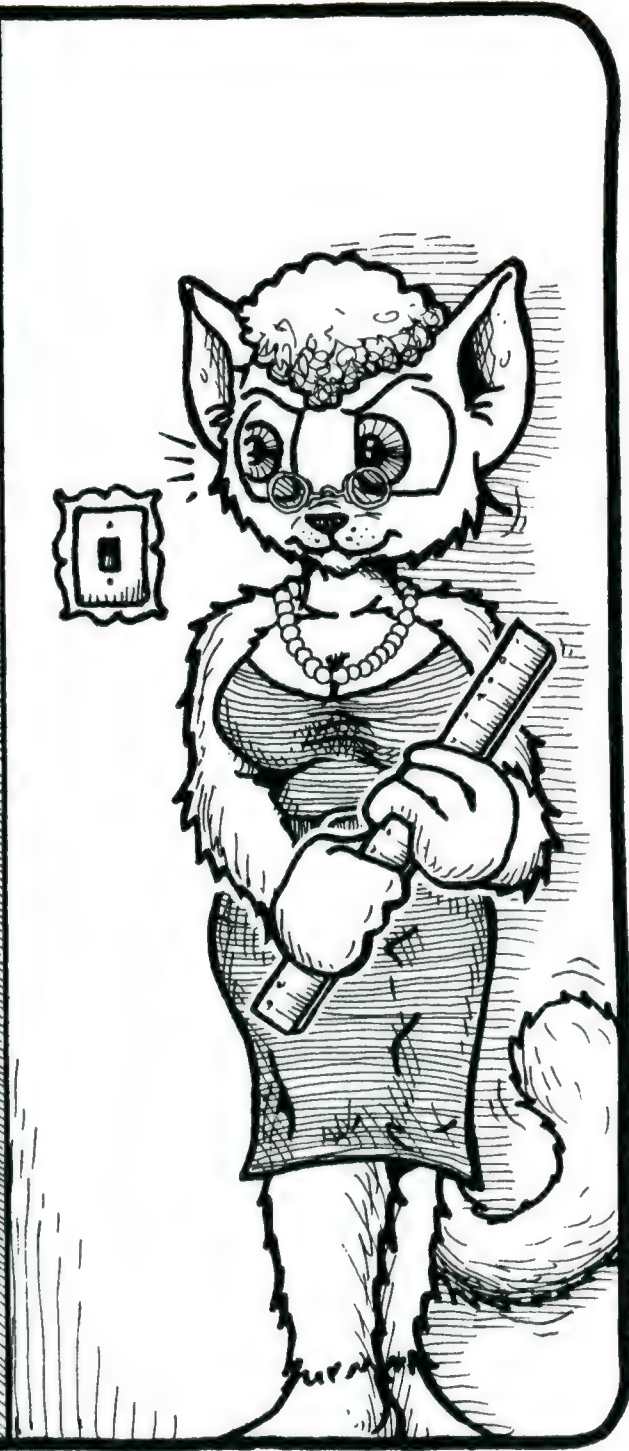
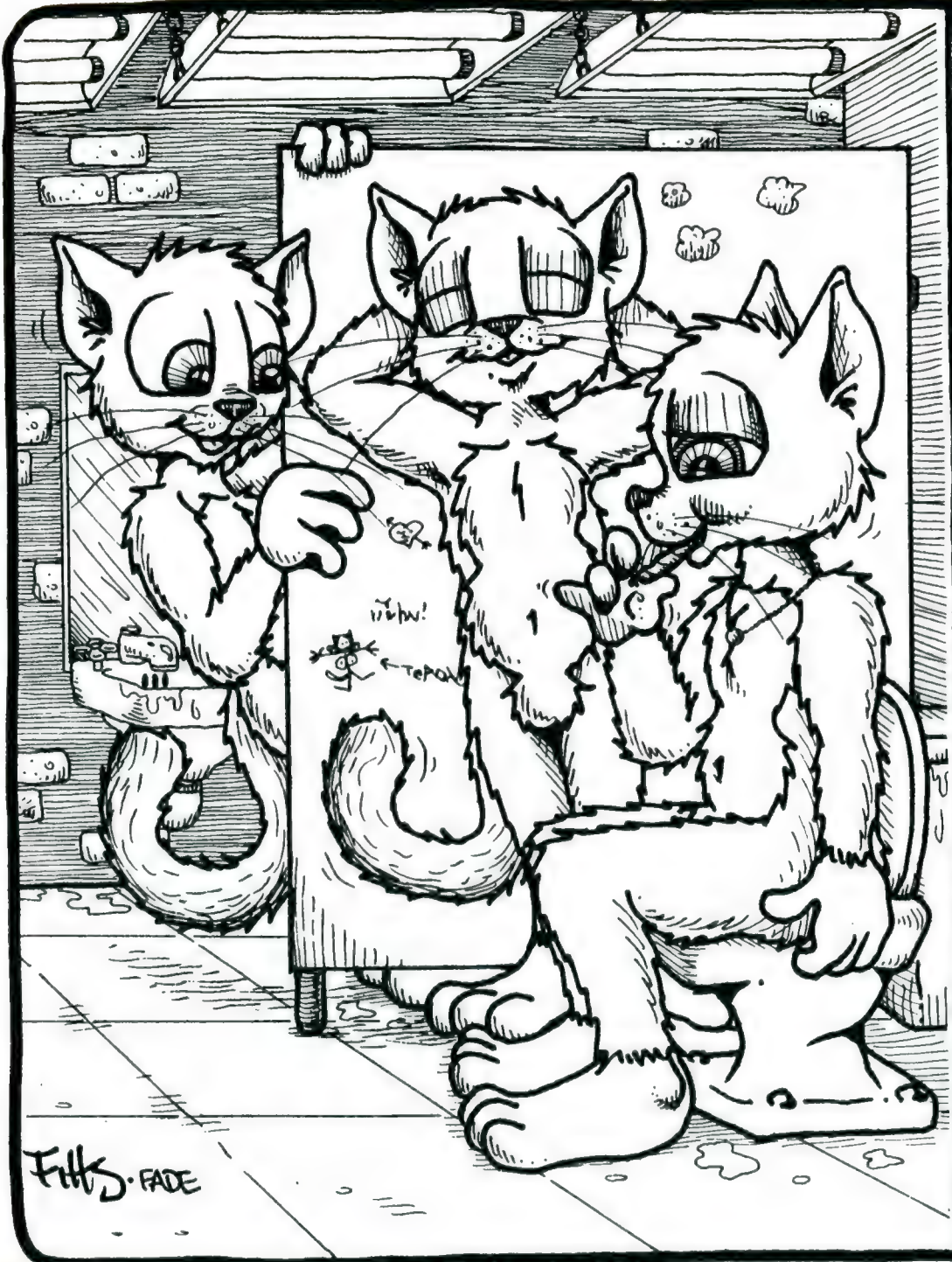
My dreams that night were, thankfully, peaceful. ☺

to be continued.

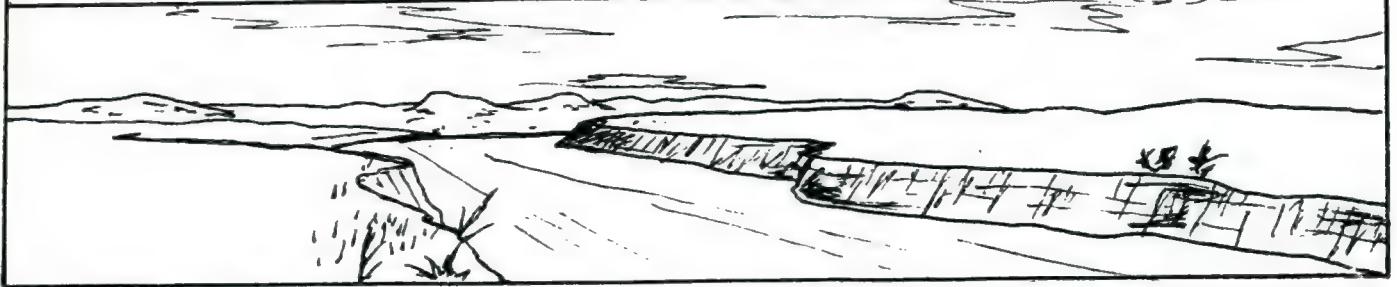


“Om”

BullFarts '90



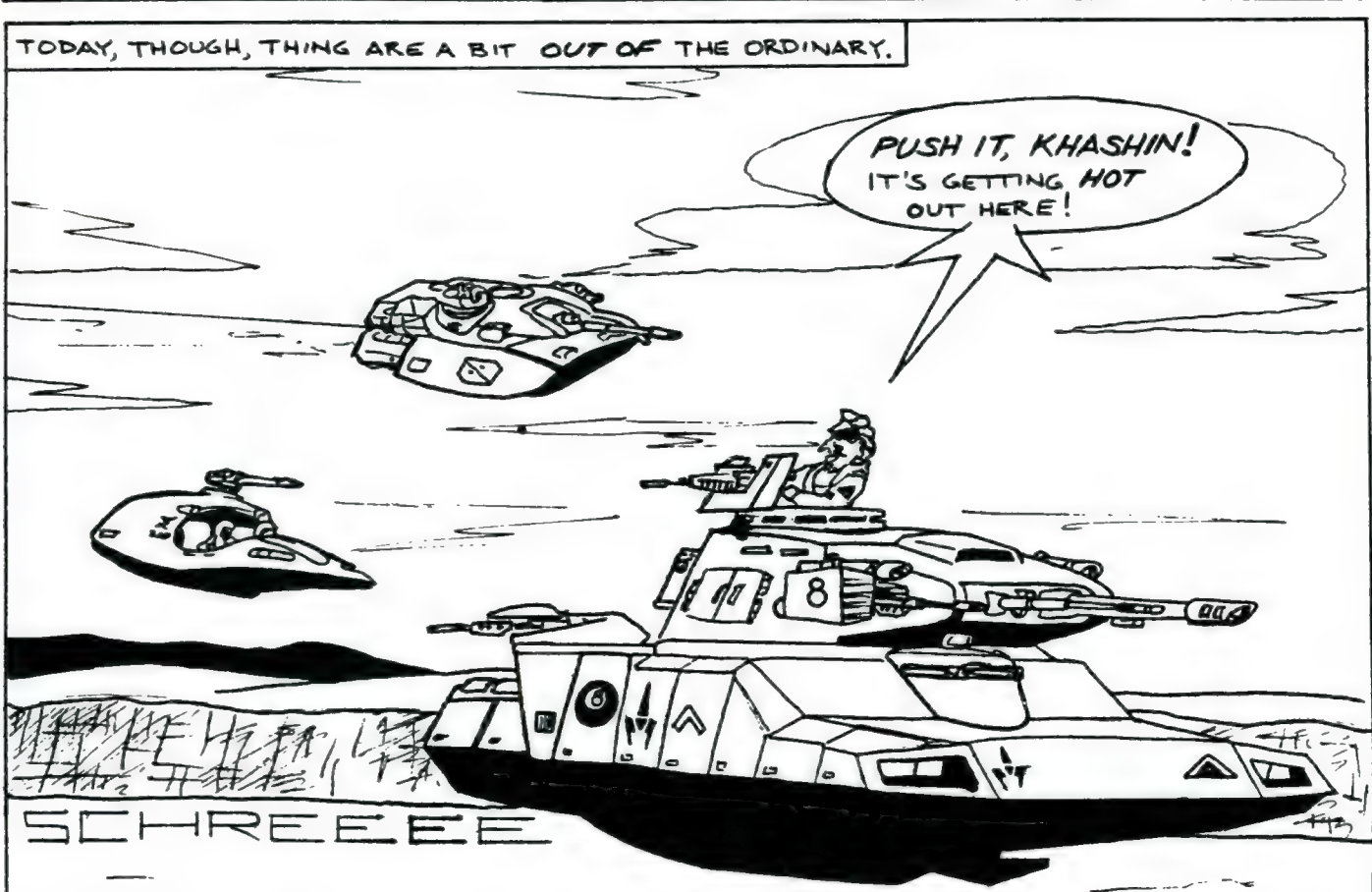
AL-BARRIN RIVER, 150 KILOMETERS WEST OF MORRIGAN'S POSITION...



IT IS, ORDINARILY, A QUIET, PEACEFUL RIVER

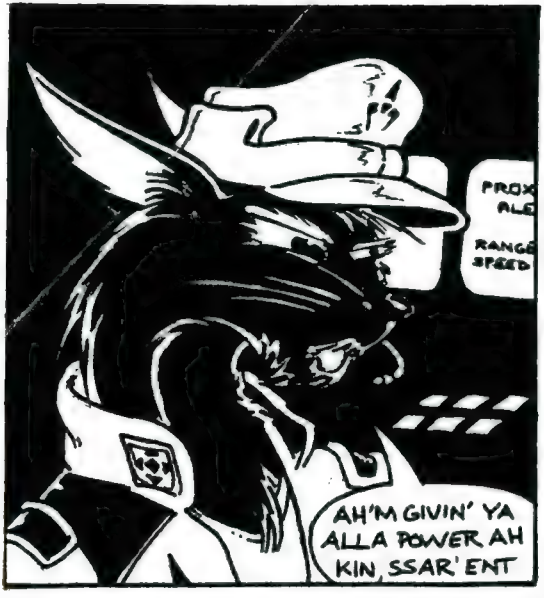


TODAY, THOUGH, THING ARE A BIT OUT OF THE ORDINARY.



EMPIRES

STORY, LAYOUT : CHRIS GRANT • INKS : ERIC BLUMRICH • LETTERING : LANCE RUND



PROX
ALE
RANGE
SPEED

AH'M GIVIN' YA
ALLA POWER AH
KIN, SSAR' ENT



"WELL, YOU BETTER
SHIT SOME EVASIVES
RIGHT QUICK!"

EY! DON'T
SINGE MY HAIR,
YOU GODLESS
HEATHEN BASTARDS!

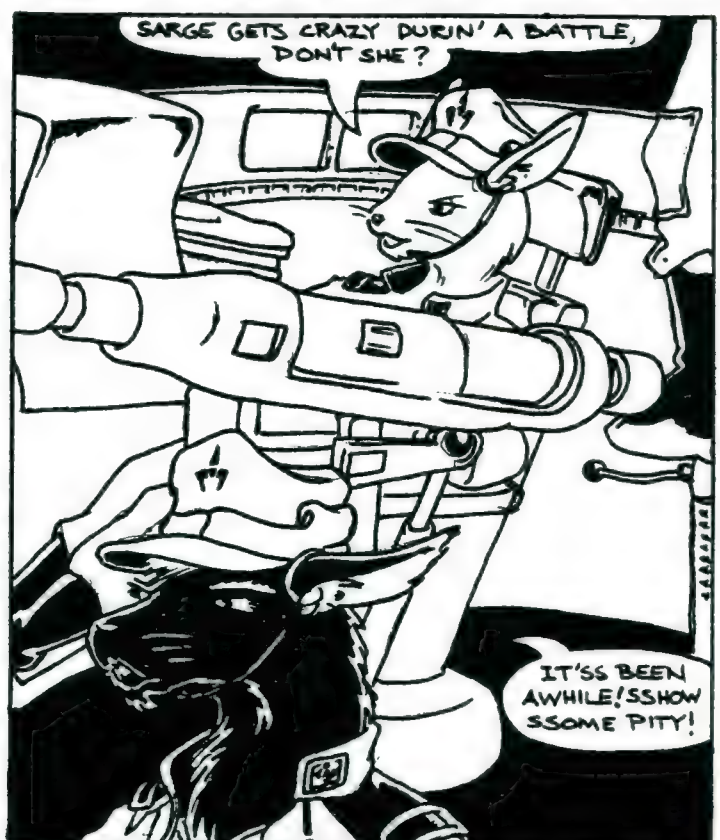
TOK!

EMPERAL SHITSIVE
KILLED:
HH III



YA WANT FANCLY
MOVESSES, YAA,
SSSARGEANT...

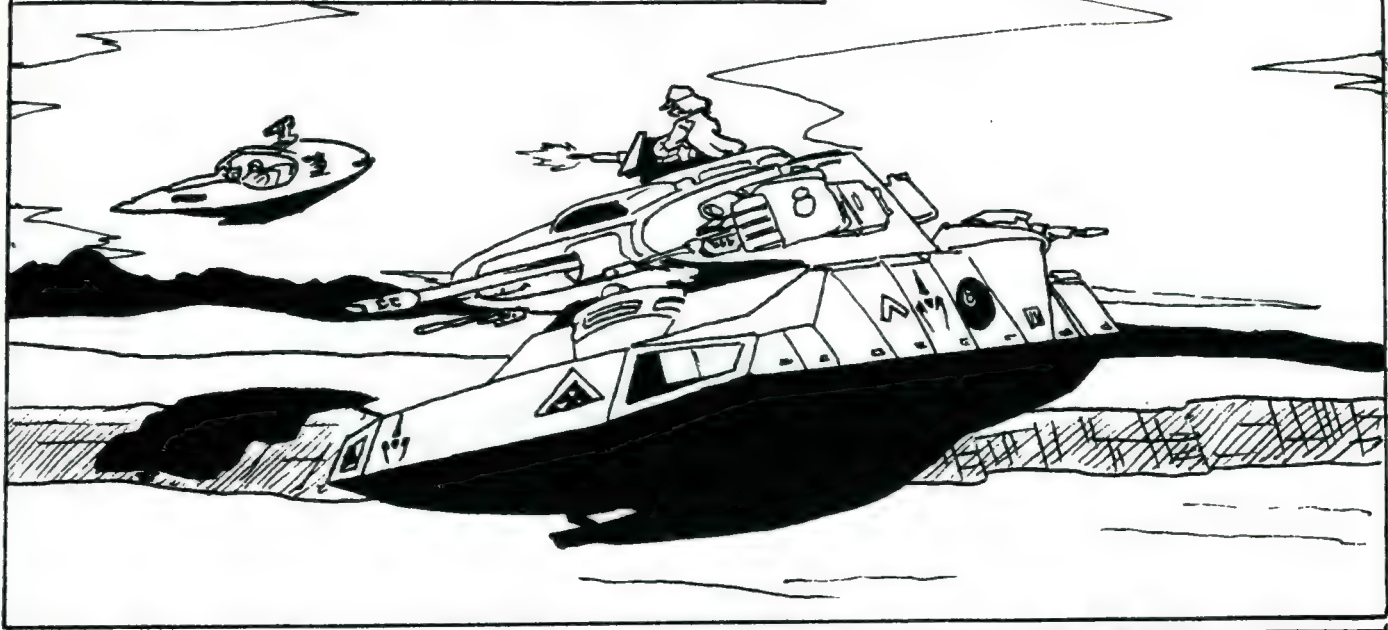
CONSSIDER
IT DONE!

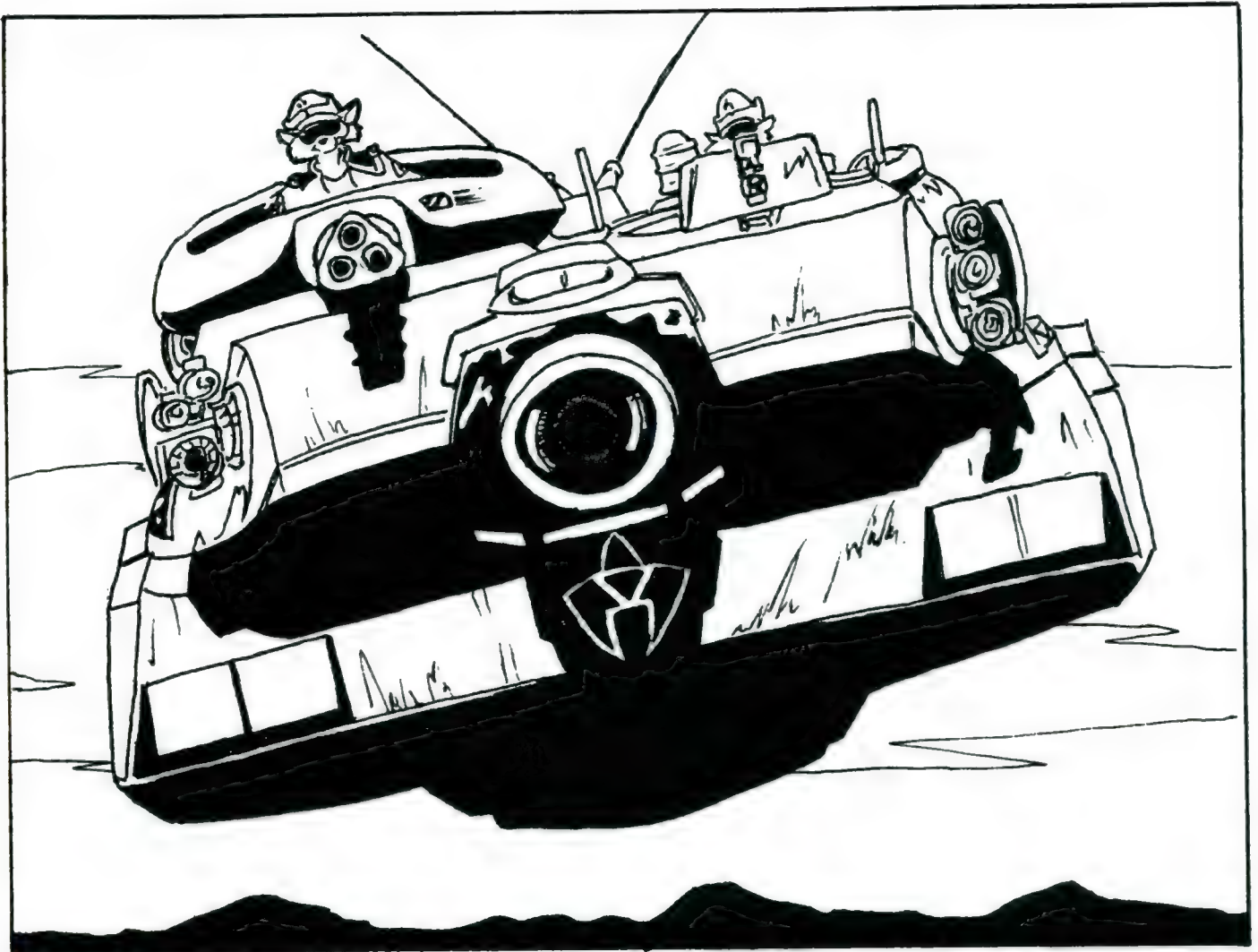


SARGE GETS CRAZY DURIN' A BATTLE,
DONT SHE?

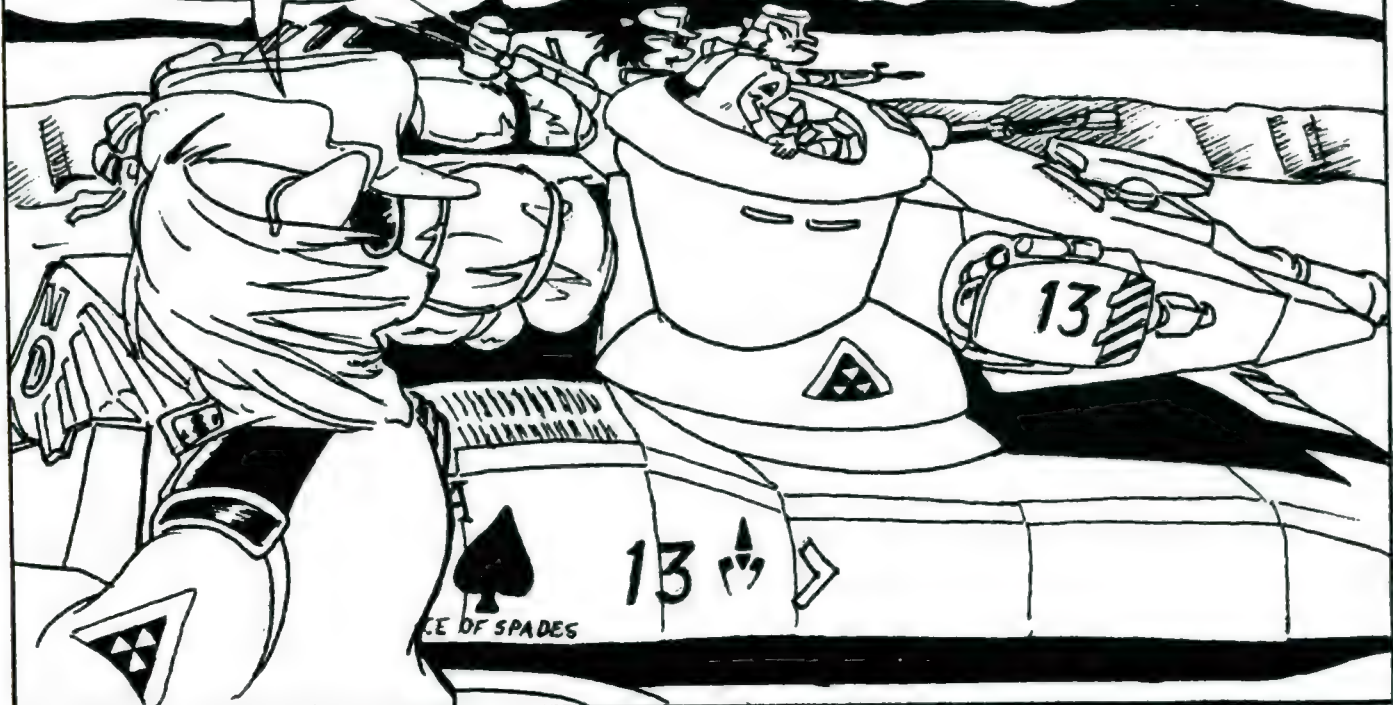
IT'SS BEEN
AWHILE! SSHOW
SSOME PITY!

THE EIGHTBALL - AN INFANTRY SUPPORT VEHICLE - ALSO CAUGHT BEHIND ENEMY LINES. IT'S CREW HAS SURVIVED ALONE FOR THREE DAYS...





SOMEONE CALLED THE CAVALRY WHEN WE WAEN'T LOOKIN'... DON'T LOOK A GIFT TANK IN THE BORE! LET'S HELP 'EM OUT!





THE IMPERIAL TANK COMMANDER REACTS QUICKLY

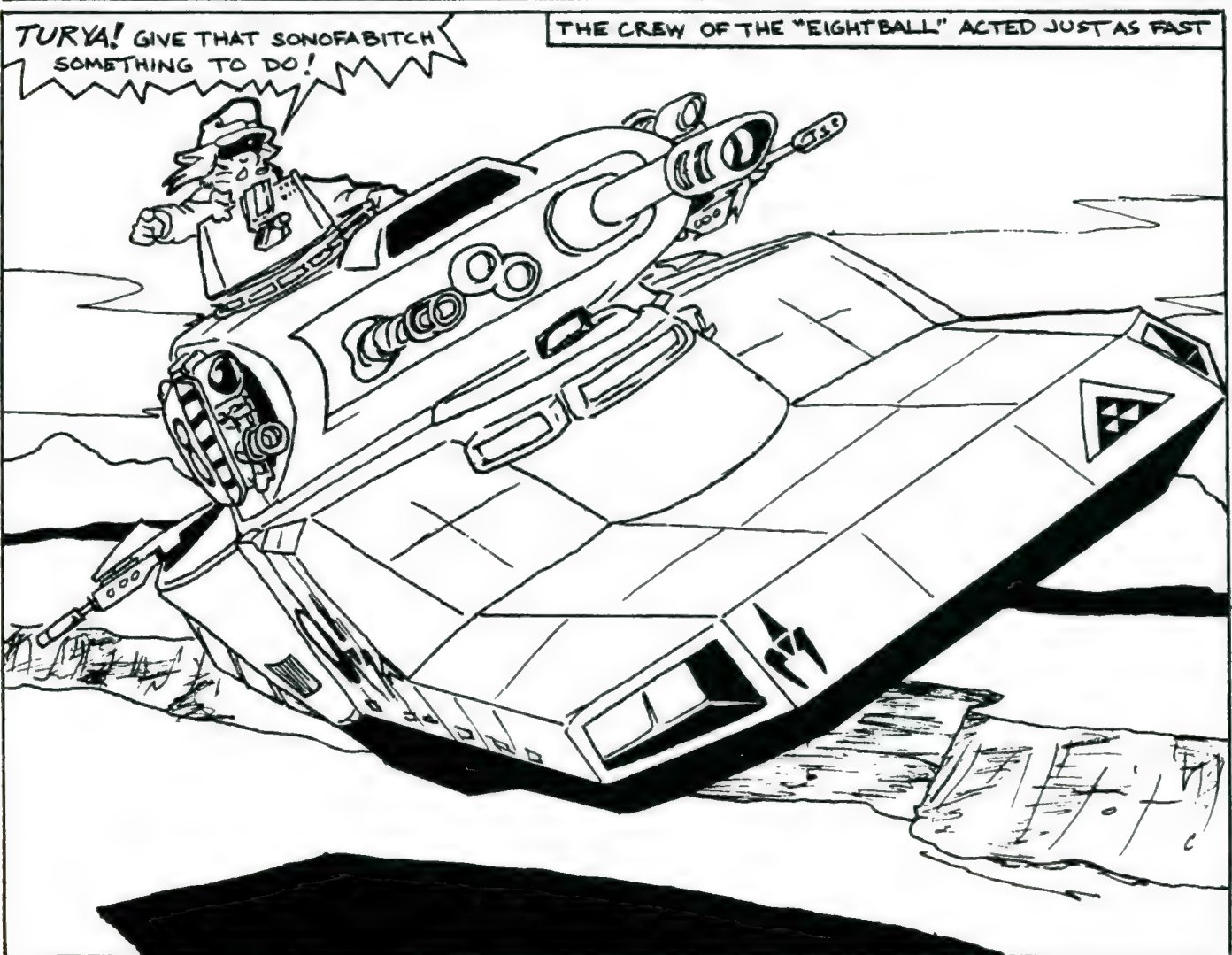
TRaverse Turret! NOW!

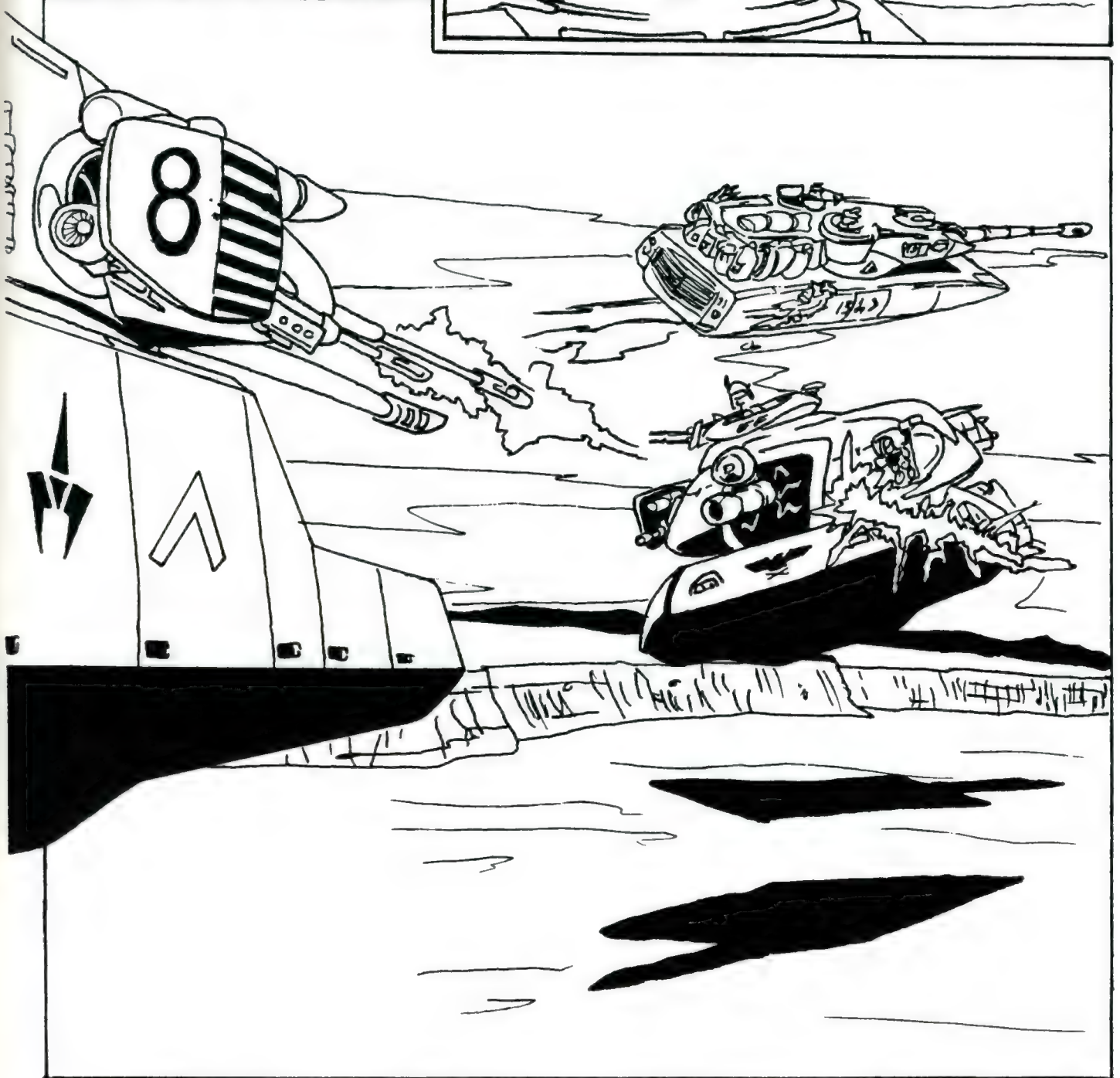
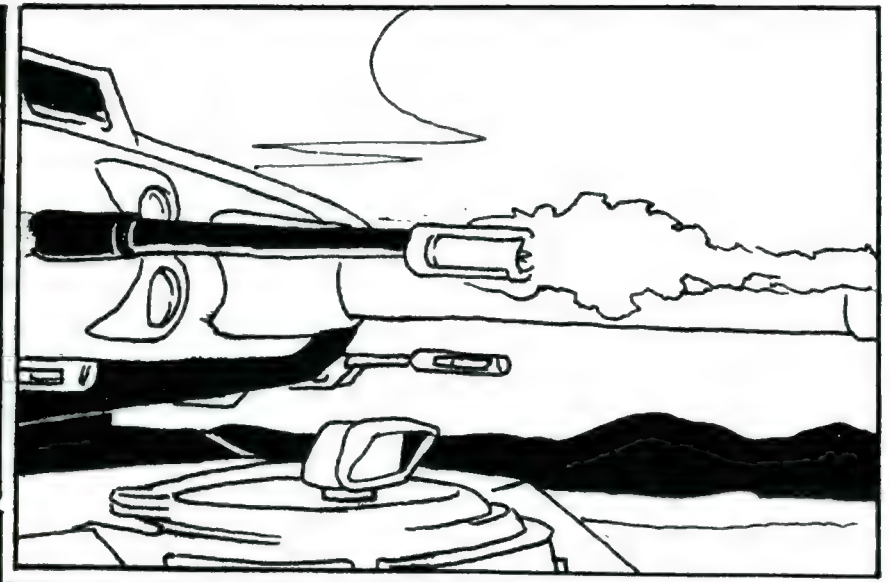
BOOM

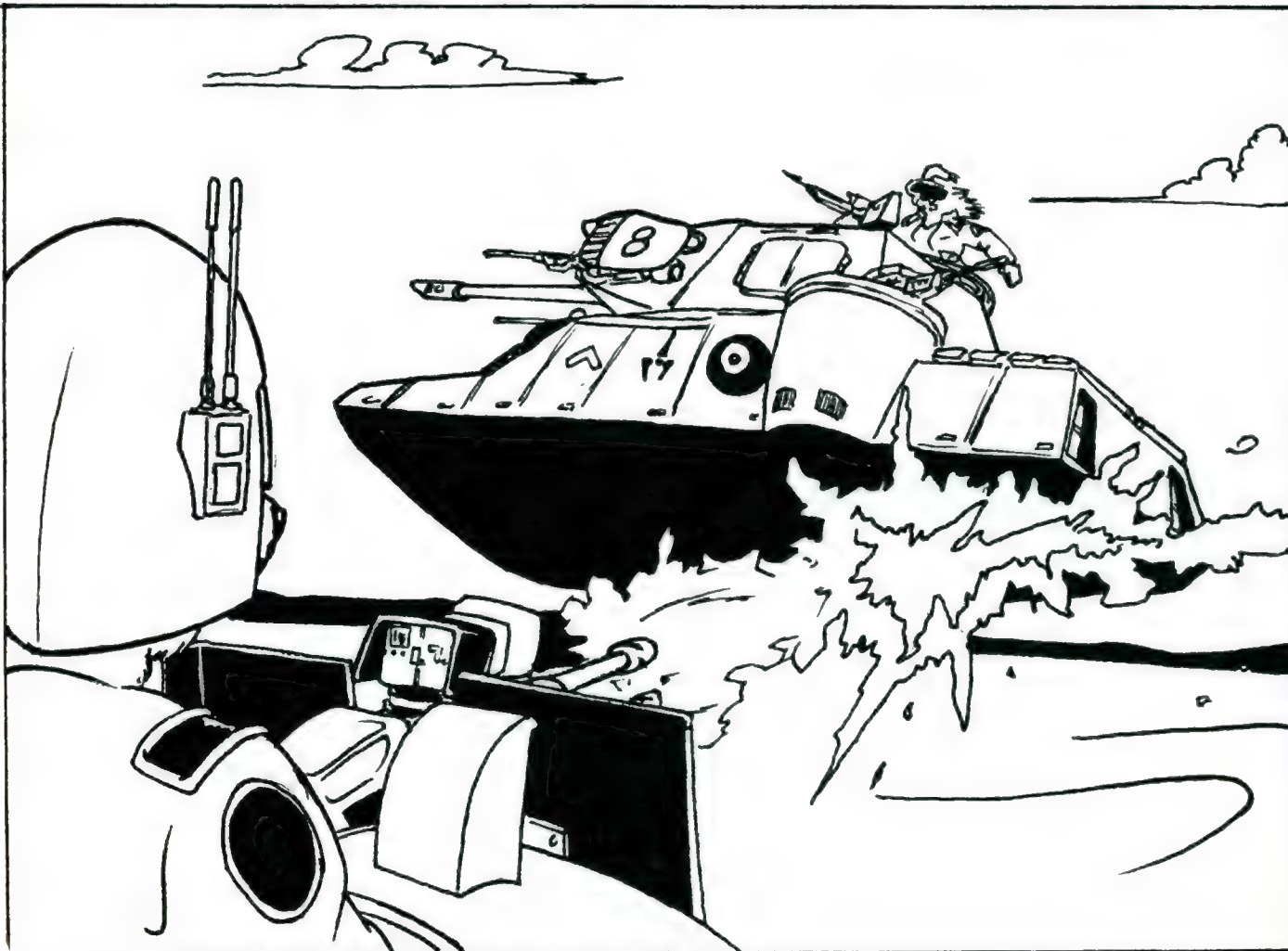
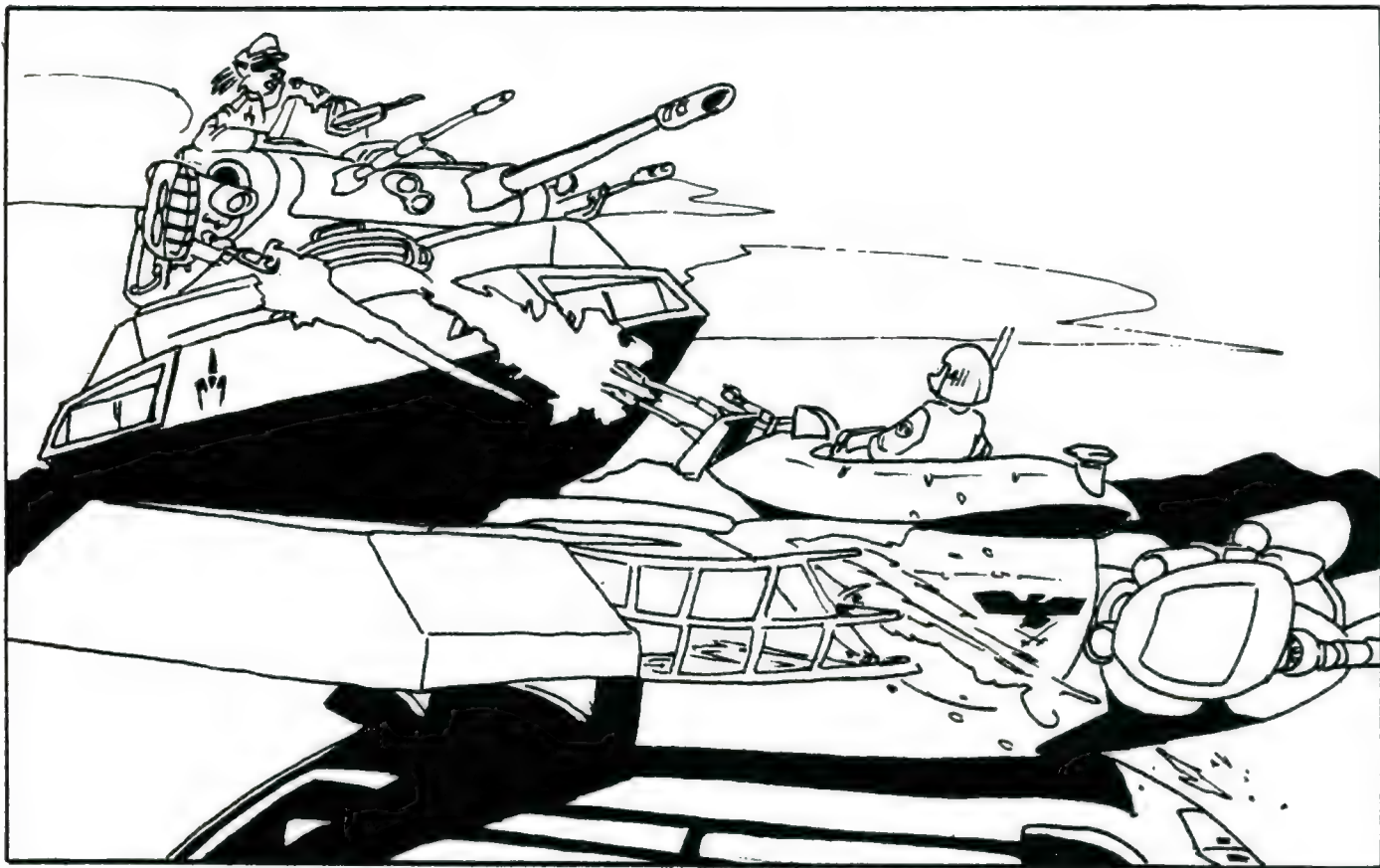


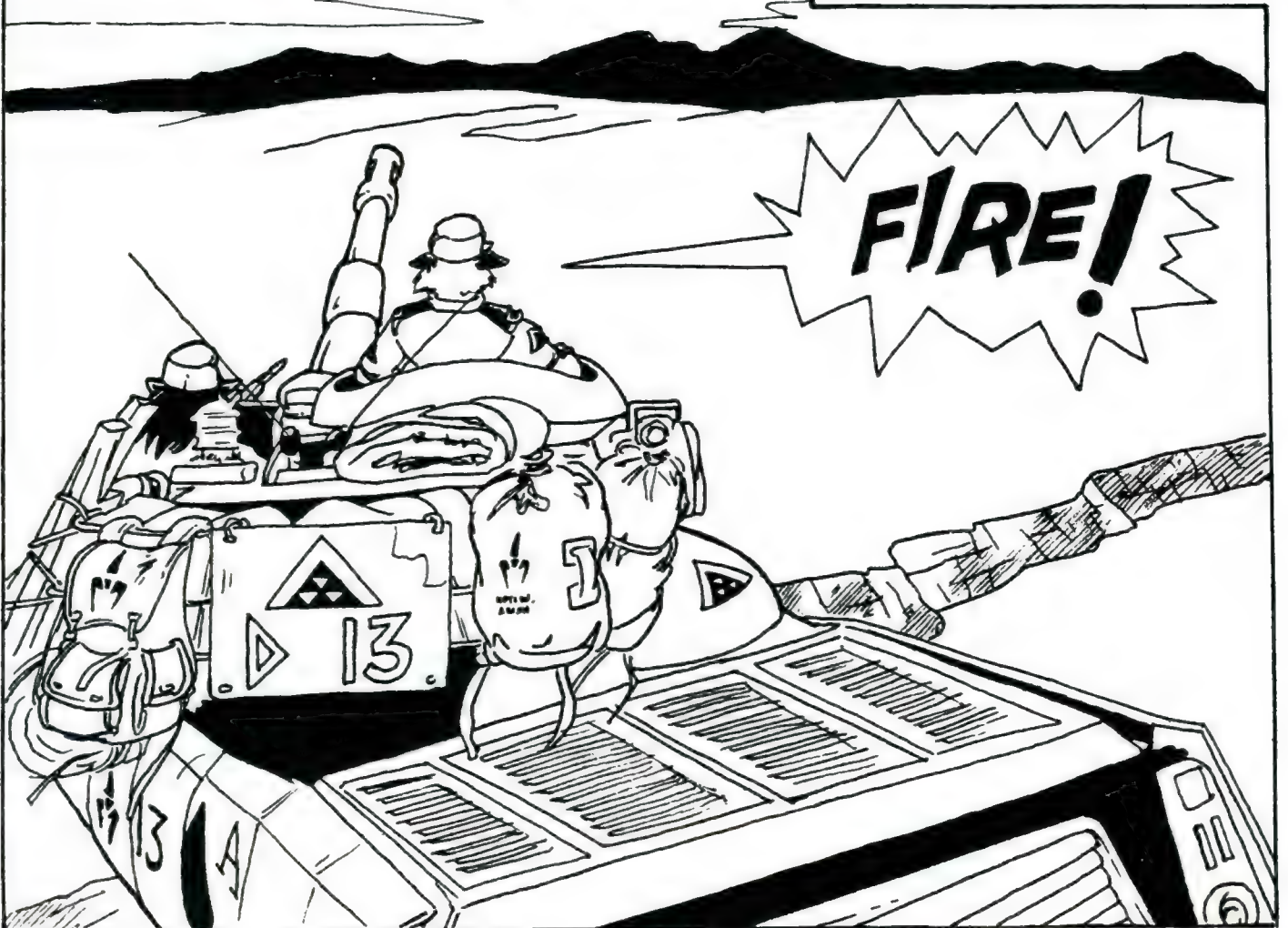
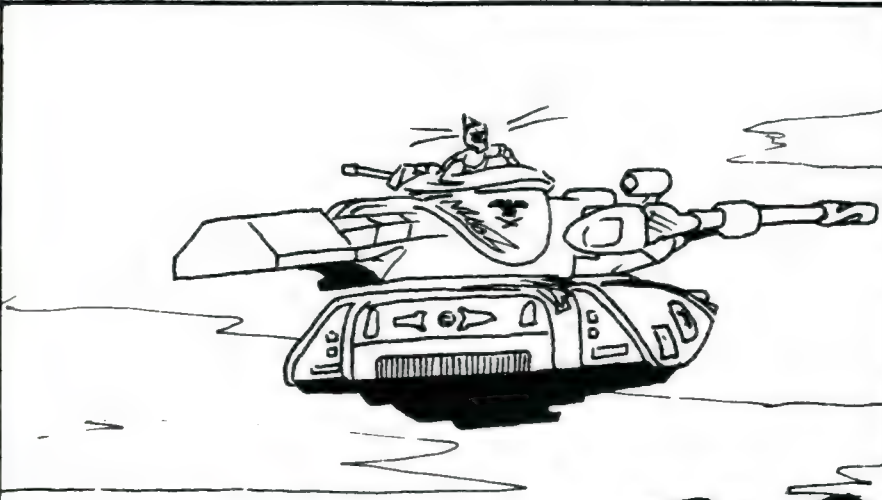
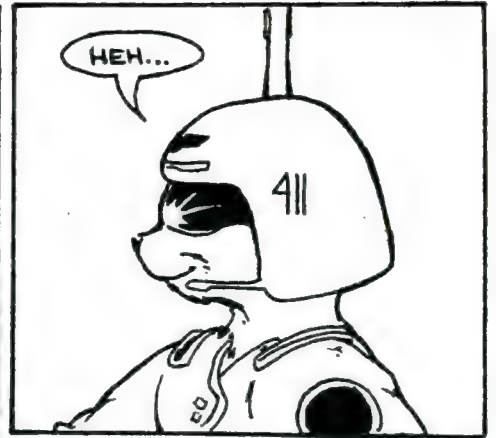
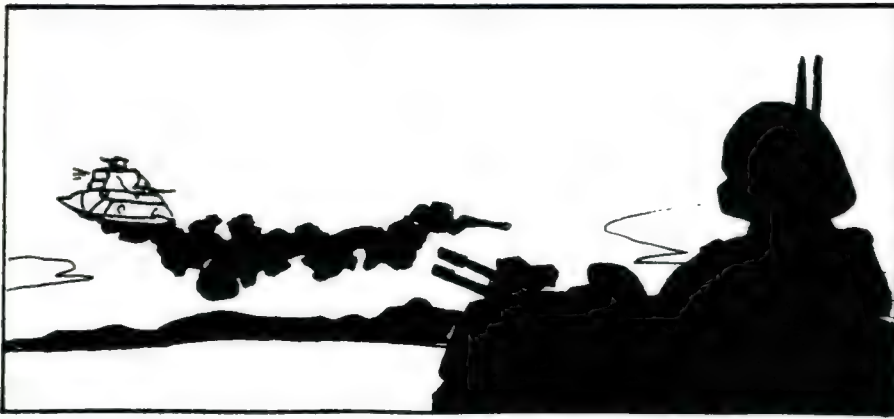
TURYA! GIVE THAT SONOFABITCH SOMETHING TO DO!

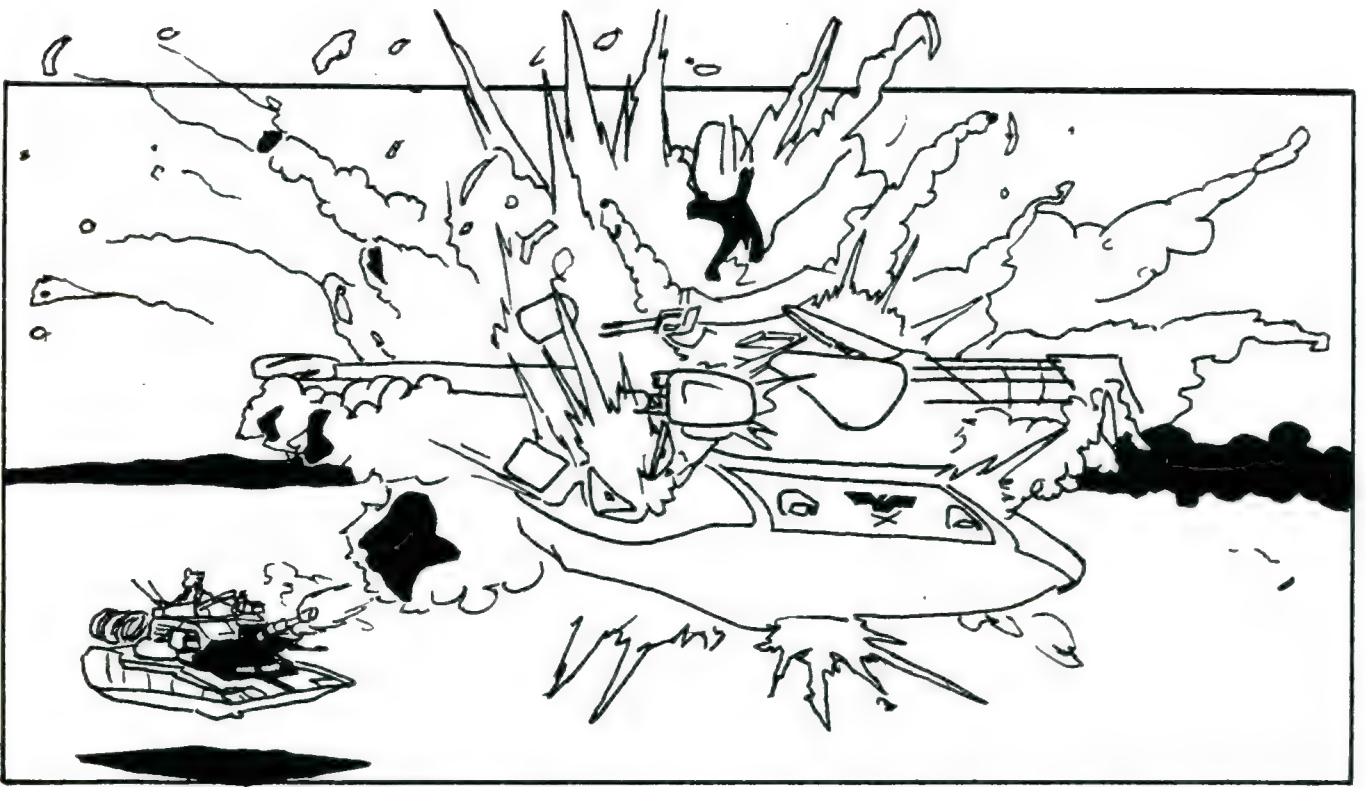
THE CREW OF THE "EIGHTBALL" ACTED JUST AS FAST



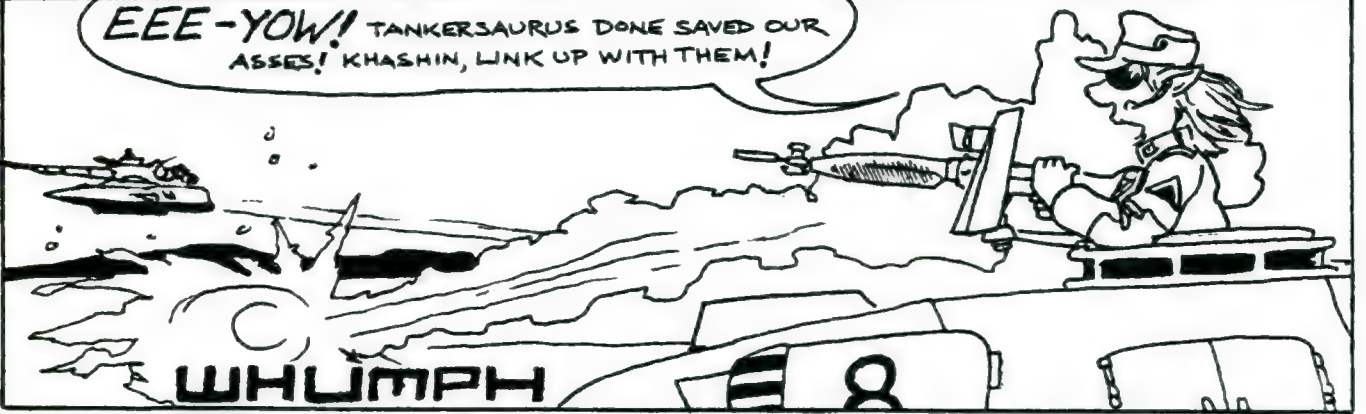






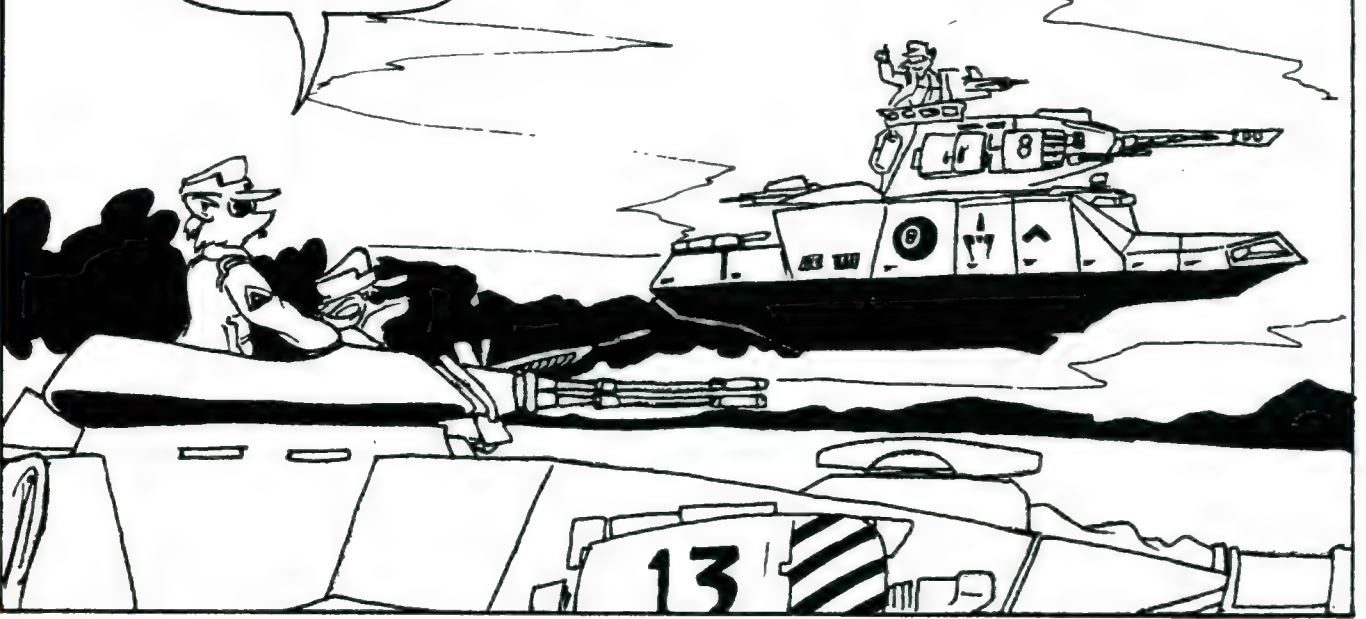


EEE-YOW! TANKERSAURUS DONE SAVED OUR ASSES! KHASHIN, LINK UP WITH THEM!

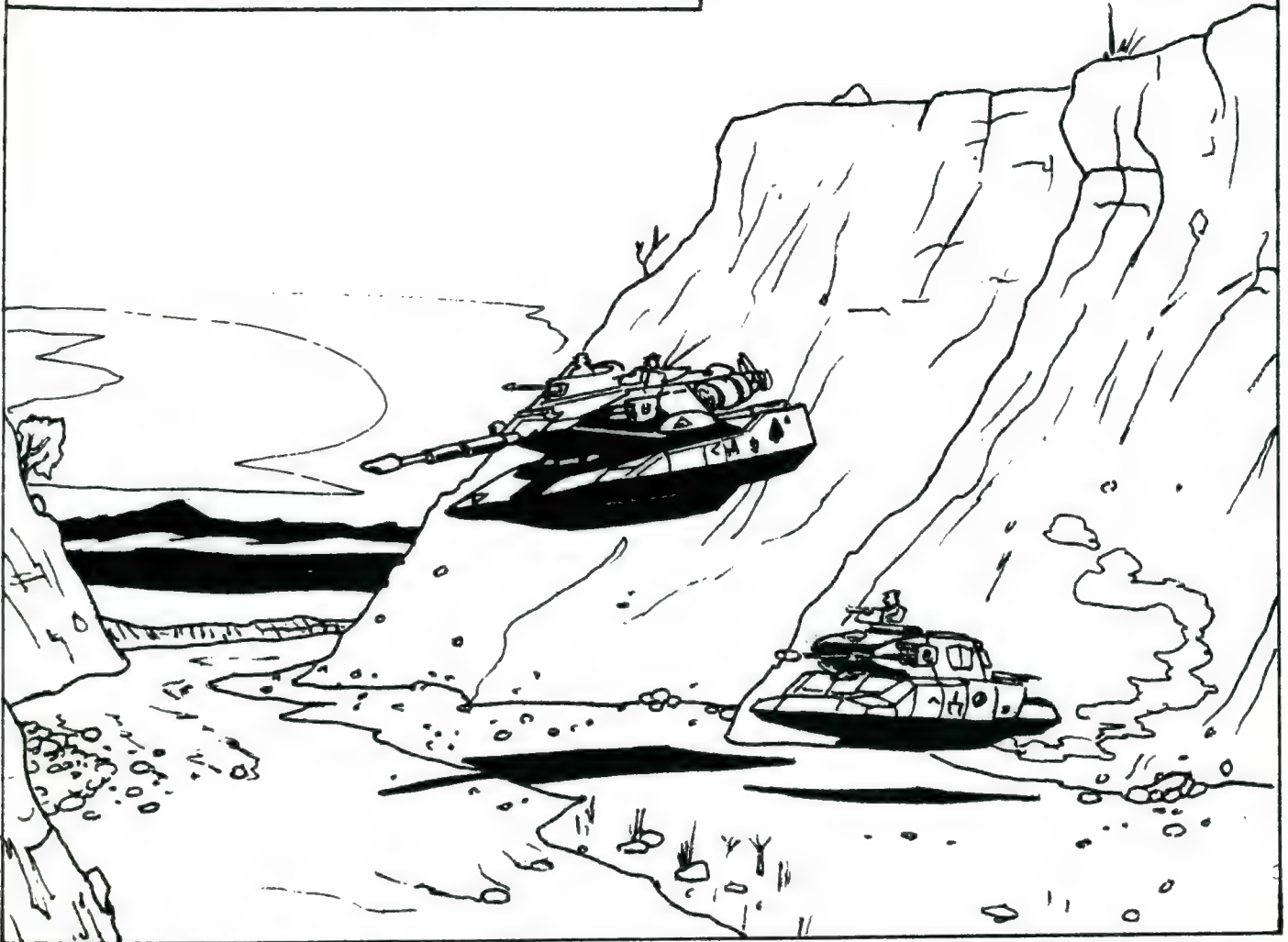


WHUMPH

THEY BETTER BE HAPPY WE SAVED THEIR BACON. CORPORAL BARONA! FALL IN BEHIND AND WE'LL FOLLOW THEM UP RIVER AND SEE WHO WE JUST ADOPTED.



MANY KILOMETERS UPRIVER, A CANYON FORMS IN THE FOOTHILLS. THE ACE OF SPADES AND THE EIGHTBALL CAME TO REST AT THE CANYON FLOOR



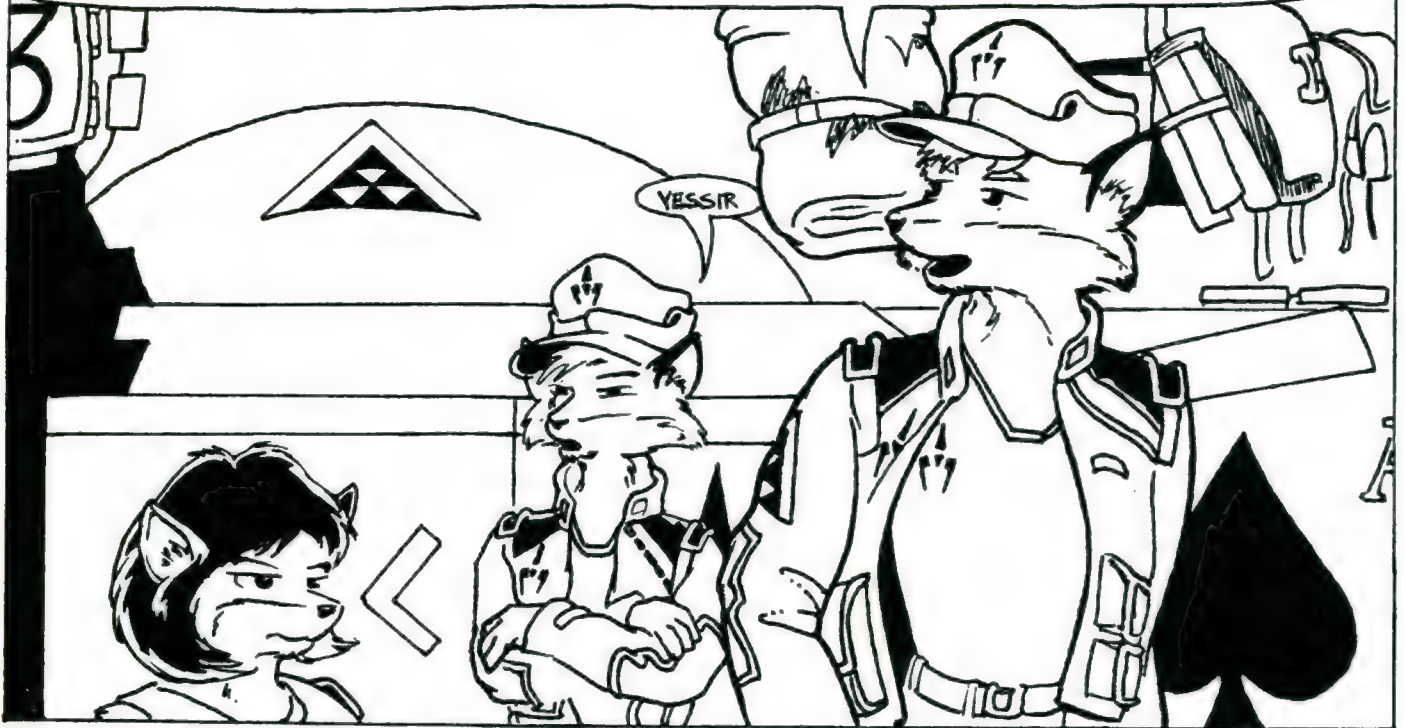
KHASHIN! TURYA AND I ARE GOING OVER THERE CALL IF YOU NEED US.

UNDERSTOOD

I WANNA MEET THAT GUNNER!



BARONA...RUN A SYSTEM CHECK. TOMAC, KEEP SENSORS AT FULL GAIN. SHADDOCK, NILE... YOU TWO RECON THE AREA AND MEET ME IN FIFTEEN MINUTES WITH A REPORT.



SQUAD SERGEANT...?

...SIERRA CHENNAULT. THIS IS MY GUNNER, CORPORAL TURYA SALISH. FORGIVE ME IF I DON'T SALUTE, BUT SNIPERS MAKE A TERRIBLE NUISANCE

THANK YOU FOR HELPING US OUT OF THERE, SIR



YOU WOULD'VE DONE THE SAME. SO, WHAT HAPPENED? HOW'D YOU FOLKS GET LEFT BEHIND?



THIS IS PROBABLY FAMILIAR TO YOU... WE WERE ON ROUTINE PATROL FOR SECOND PLATOON, ALPHA COMPANY...



... WE LOST CONTACT WITH COMPANY HQ. WHEN WE RETURNED TO THE FIREBASE, IT WAS DESTROYED. COULDN'T HAIL ANYONE ON THE BRIGADE FREQS, SO WE DECIDED TO RUN FOR SECTOR ZERO-NINE AND LINK WITH 4TH BRIGADE... THE KON PATROL JUMPED US, THEN YOU SHOWED UP



"YEAH, SOUNDS LIKE US, 'CEPT WE HID OUT AT THE OASIS FOR A WHILE"

WE'LL HAFTA MOVE UPRIVER, INTO THE MOUNTAINS. THERE'S FOREST TO HIDE IN...



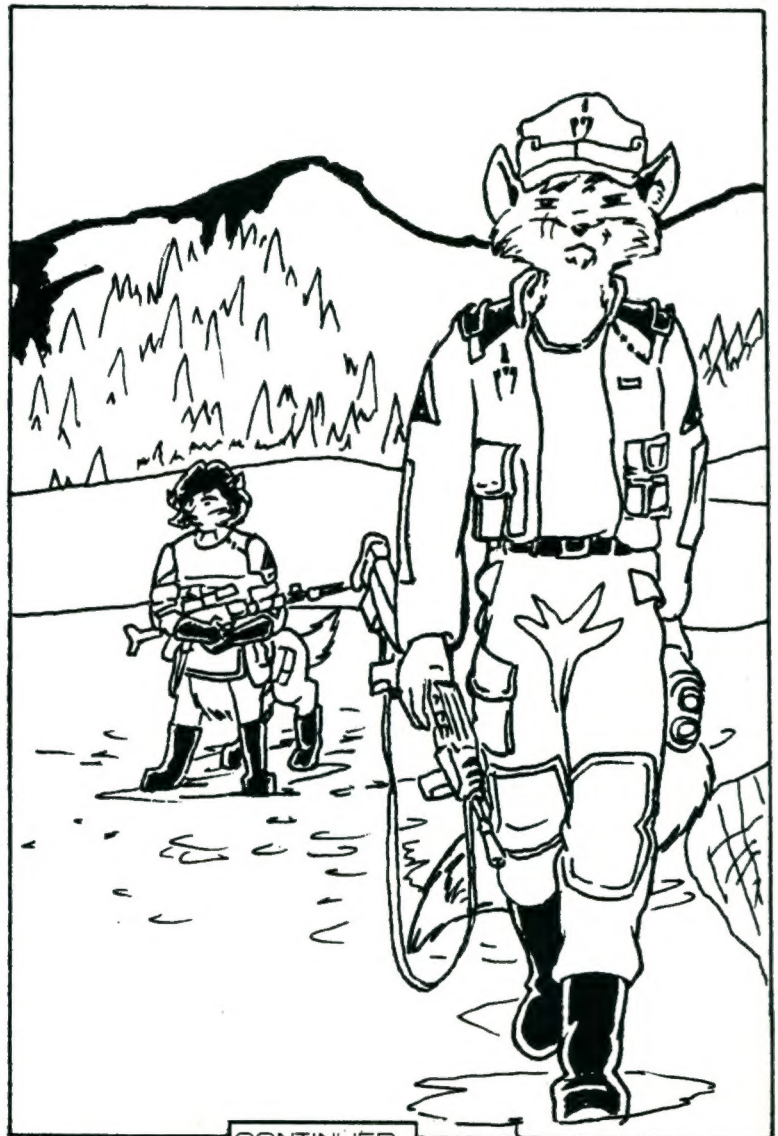
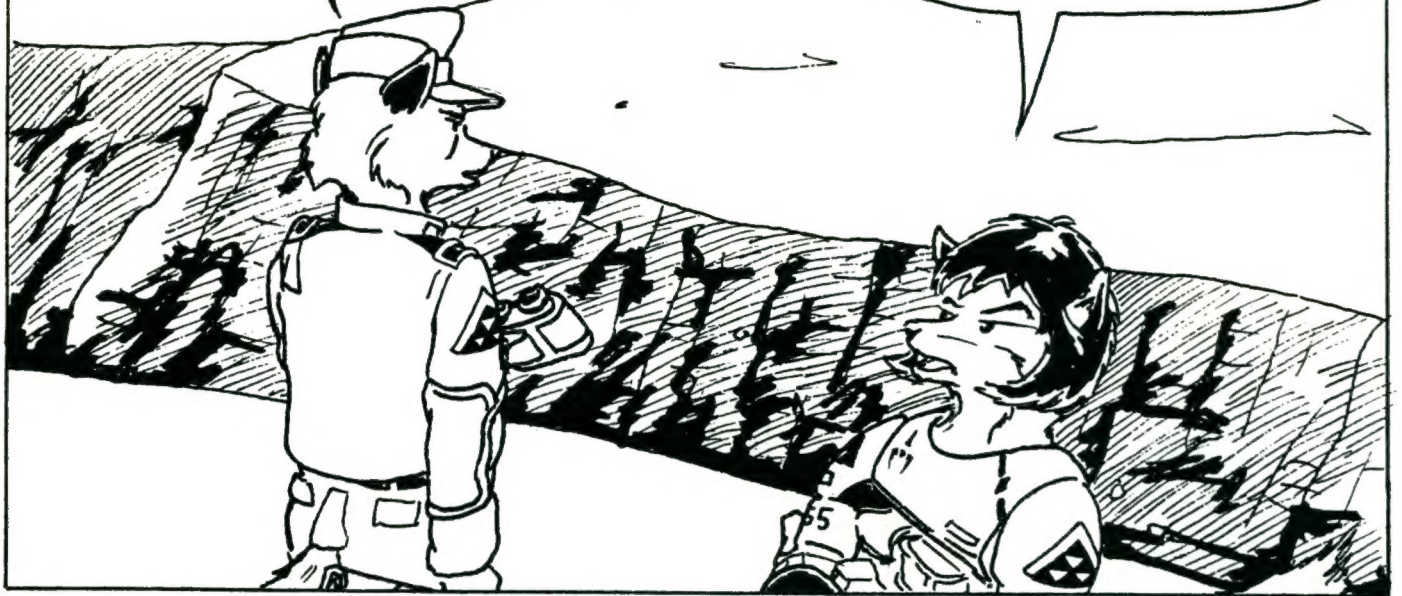
DON'T LIKE FOREST?

GRRRR...

DON'T LIKE CATS.

BEIN' CAT DON'T MAKE YA BAD. IT'S THE
UNIFORM THEY WEAR AND THE DIRECTION
THEY AIM THEIR WEAPONS.

CATS ARE CATS, EVERYWHERE.
NEVER TRUST THE BASTARDS



CONTINUED...

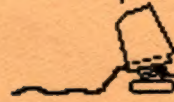
The Last Bits

DISPATCHES FROM THE ELECTRONIC FRONT

Computer prices have been dropping dramatically in the past several months. What this means for furry fandom is greater use of the bulletin boards, and a new medium for furry art. Reed Waller, Vicki Wyman, Mark Stanley, Lance Rund and others have begun to use this medium in their furry artwork, with interesting results. Disney Studios has released an animation package for use on the Commodore "Amiga" series of personal computers, and have been using computers to colorize several of their animated afternoon cartoon series.

This lends an air of legitimacy to computer-assisted furry art that is has not had before. The combination of inexpensive hand-held scanners (there are black-and-white models aivable for well under \$200.00) and good paint programs make computer-assisted art a valid medium. In the future, The Foxes' Den (the official YARF! BBS) will be making available as many furry-oriented electronic art pieces as we can get our hands on.

How many expansion slots do you have?



BUG OFF, YOU CREEP!



LR '90

KNOWN FURRY COMPUTER BULLETIN BOARDS:

SYSTEM NAME	SYSTEM OPERATOR	PHONE	PC PURSUIT OUTDIAL	MAXIMUM BAUD RATE	NOTES
The Fur Side	Charlie Kellner	415-571-1486	CAPAL	2,400	
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)	
The Polar Den	Darrel Exline	214-361-8992	TXDAL	2,400	
The Otter's Holt	Jerry Case	714-986-1525	n/a	2,400	
Stormgate Aerie	Nicolai Shapero	213-822-6729	CALAN	9,600 (HST)	
Armadillo Connection	Sleeman & Robinson	813-378-2218	n/a	2400	
The Electric Holt	Grenald & DeWeese	315-387-4326	PAPHI	2400	
The Foxes' Den	Lance Rund	408-736-4764	CASJO	19,200 (PEP), 9,600 (HST, V.32)	Official YARF! BBS. 4 lines.



BORDERLINE

an EMPIRES story

by Chris Grant
and
Maggie De Alarcon

appearing in the pages of
Mythagoras

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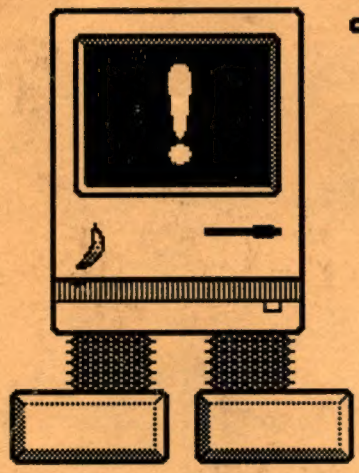


SO, DO YOU
WANNA COME UP
TO MY PLACE AND
SEE MY SOFTWARE?



SHE LIKES
ME !

...now what ?



YARF!

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