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Mythagoras

No. 3
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The Boar Goes North
Matt Posner

UltraSheep
Bernie Middendorf
Franklin Veaux

How the Ibis Bent its Beak
Paul Kidd



MYTHAGORAS

"Why should we always have to give people what they want? Why the hell can't we give them what they need?"
— Don Henley

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LETTERS

So *Mythagoras* has twelve more pages and two more colors on the cover, but you have fifty less cents. However, this isn't the new "standard" for the magazine—normally, covers will be two-color. The cover price will (hopefully) stabilize at $3.75 with issue #4. Mail order prices for single copies and subscriptions will remain constant, regardless of each issue's cover price, although both have been changed due to upcoming postage rate hikes (they are now $4.75 for a single postpaid issue and $18 for a year's subscription).

Mythagoras is fairly expensive to produce. The biggest source of income (next to out-and-out donations) is subscriptions; if you enjoy us and would like to see this magazine continue, *please* subscribe. And spread the word about us.

Thanks for the quick posting of my copy of Mythagoras #2. I did, indeed, enjoy it.

I already know and enjoy Watts Martin and Chuck Melville's work from elsewhere.

Kevin Higgins' "Of the Father, Upon the Son" was a nasty little piece, but well done.

"Of Storm and Furry" sounds like the start of a mystery. I like the idea of a bipedal elephantine species. It's a nice twist on smooth vs. furwithout letting Terrans into the picture.

"Captain No-Theft" is an odd story, but an interesting start of a look at a dystopic future society. (By the way, I cannot believe in inter-corporate nuclear warfare. It's *very* bad for business.)

The art was good, though more eclectic than I usually see in an anthropomorphic oriented publication. However, since *Mythagoras* is eclectic, the art fits.

"Overheard" is fun. "Furry" was also amusing. Anthropomorphic filk songs? Oh, my!

GERALD PERKINS
SUNNYVALE, CA

At the 1990 San Diego Comic Con, I purchased issue #2 of Mythagoras at the Furry Party. I found it to be very entertaining, the artwork and storylines are first rate.

By the way, I am an associate member of the International Marine Animal Trainers Association, and in regard to the "Overheard" column in issue #2, Richard O'Barry's comment on the Navy's use of dolphins—the Navy abandoned the "Swimmer Nullification System" in the early part of the 1970's. The dolphins were deemed "unreliable" in choosing friendly vs. hostile targets (thank God). The Navy has since used dolphins in search and rescue projects, as shark deterrents, and in support roles for underwater research divers, *not* as weapons of war. The trainers and staff of the Naval Ocean System Center hold these animals in very high regard, and would absolutely *not* place them in jeopardy. In my opinion, Mr. O'Barry is obviously "stuck in the '60s."

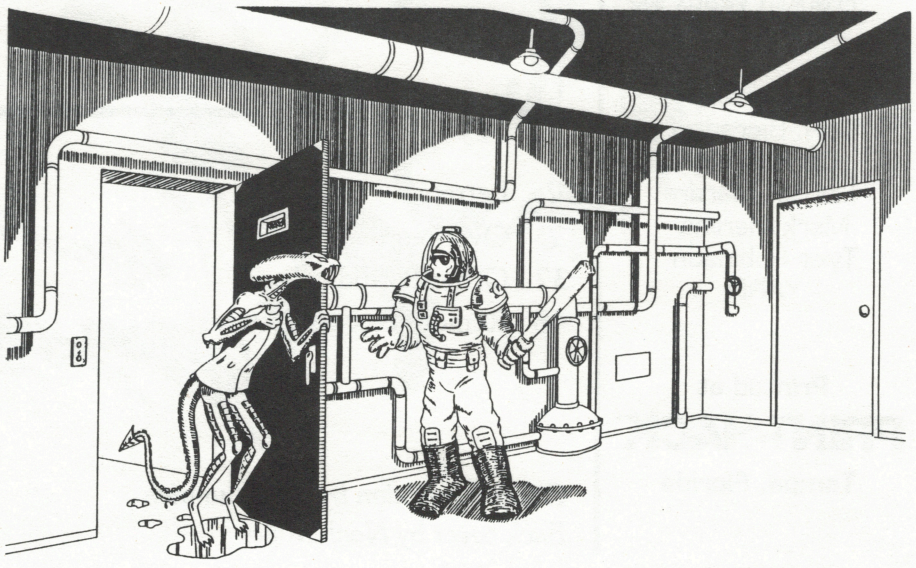
JOHN C. GRINDSTAFF
NORWALK, CT

David Reams, a Los Angeles Zoo dolphin trainer who formerly worked for the Navy, told the Herald he trained the animals with nose cones in 1986 and 1987 but was never told what the devices were for. Lt. James Wood, a Navy spokesman at the Pentagon, declined to comment on the nose-gun reports.

In 1988, it was reported that 13 dolphins in training for the Navy's marine mammal program died during a two-year period. Nearly half of the animals suffered from lack of appetite or stomach ulcers....

Right! Well, issues 1 and 2 arrived a couple of weeks ago in a remarkably agreeable number of pieces, with nary a dent on them.

So—impressions. Overall, particularly professional in appearance—the two-tone color of number 2 certainly stands out; but then, I'm a sucker for Zjonni's artwork anyway. Maggie's simply continues to get better and better, and 2's page 29 shows particularly. Watts Martin's *Travelling Music* has caught me in the same way as his *A Gift of Fire* [Yarf! #5-#8] has... to be quite honest, there's very little to criticise! The only shortcomings were due to the smaller page count compared to *Yarf!*, thereby preventing a fuller



STAN LEE '89

Look, I'm sorry that I got you out of the shower. Now if you don't mind, I still need to beat your brains out with my baseball bat.

LETTERS

section on furry BBSs (one point—could you list the Tymnet outdial nodes too? Obviously, they're not nearly as popular as PC Pursuit, but that's what I'm stuck with until I can convince Telenet to allow me an account... here I am, with a perfectly working PCP node in London, and no means of using it beyond sniffing 'round *The Net Exchange*. Grrr.)

Jan Paxton
Tonyrefail, Mid Glamorgan
United Kingdom

You did an excellent job on #2. The cover looks great, and I enjoyed all of the art and writing inside, especially Watts Martin's story and Kay Shapero's poem (I wish you'd had her illustrate it; perhaps you could print some of her art in a future issue).

I'm impressed with the quality of Mythagoras after only two issues; it'll be interesting to see how much better you can make it. Good luck!

John L. Jones, Jr.
Detroit, MI

I appreciated the list of other furry periodicals, as I have had problems finding addresses for some of the titles I had heard of.

With regards to the article by Franklin Veaux, "Object-Oriented Environmentalism Under Z-System" [issue #1], it would have been nice if you had mentioned a location where the Z-System could be found or where more information could be obtained.

Keep up the good work.

Kim Liu
Georgia Institute of Technology
Atlanta, GA

The Z-System (ZSDOS, NZ-COM and/or Z3-Plus) is available for most Z-80-based CP/M and CP/M Plus systems from Sage Microsystems East, 1435 Centre Street, Newton Centre, MA 02159-2469. Voice: 617-965-3552 (9:00 AM – 11:00 PM) Modem: 617-965-7259. ❑



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Submission Guidelines

Fiction, Poetry, and Articles: If possible, send on Macintosh diskette (MacWrite, WriteNow or Word). We can also read MS-DOS (WordPerfect, WordStar, ASCII); Z-System, Kaypro II/IV (WordStar, ASCII); LDOS, LS-DOS, AmigaDOS (ASCII only). Printed submissions are, of course, also acceptable. Please send work in 10 pitch (12 point) type, double-spaced with no justification.

Artwork and Graphic Stories: Please send two *high-quality* photocopies or stats (non-screened photocopies are unacceptable for pencil work!). If you must send originals and require them to be returned, please enclose a postpaid return mailer. Please, mail all artwork flat!

Deadlines: #4, 12/12/1990; #5, 3/13/1991

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The Boar Goes North

Matt Posner

"DON'T LIKE DOGS," HE SAID. HIS VOICE WAS GARBLED BY the yellow tusks that curved out of his mouth on either side, but those with an ear for dialect could hear Oklahoma in his speech. "They scent me as soon as I pass them. One time I was pushing through some woods at night and I stumbled into a clearing with a shack in it. There was a mean dog there, guarding the place for the man who lived in the shack, I reckon. Need that kind of protection, or better, with mutant bandit gangs roamin' about." He paused, snuffed at the smoky air, looked at his big, empty glass. "Shoot. No more beer."

"I'll see to that," the man said. He tossed a silver coin over his shoulder; the bartender, a dusty fat fellow with a double pupil in one eye, caught it and drew the boar another stein, which he set down on the wet wooden table.

"Well," said the boar, scraping the table with his hairy, clawed fingers, "that dog came charging up at me with a growl louder than a gun shot. I didn't even have a chance to drop my pack before he hit me. Wham! He was five foot high at the shoulder, jaws bigger than an alligator. Hell, anyone's been around's seen the enlarged animals they made with those DNA experiments before the war."

"We've seen some," the man said, nodding at his friend, who was just bigger than a child and was entirely hidden in a heavy robe. "But go on."

The boar snuffed at his beer; foam drifted to the table and vanished. He took a sip. "Well, that dog was so big and so angry that he couldn't find my throat at first once he knocked me down. I flipped him over backward into the underbrush and threw my pack off so I could fight him." He started drinking his beer and sat in silence for some time.

"So?" sneered the little fellow in a thin voice.

The boar snorted. "Why don't you drop your hood, son?" he asked, not replying to the fellow's question. "I can smell a rat when I meet one."

Grumbling, the rat shook his head so that his cowl fell away, revealing a brown hairy face with a protrusive snout; a rat, sure enough.

"Thought so," said the boar. "Ain't never had nothing against rats in general, but never met one I liked." He settled back into his chair, scratching his black belly.

"What happened in the fight?" asked the man, a bit more politely.

"Heh," laughed the boar. "Haven't met a dog yet I can't lick. After I killed him, the man in the house came out with a shotgun and a bag of grenades. I told him I was sorry about his dog and I gave him something from my pack; box of pistol ammo, probably. He didn't shoot at me, so I went on travelling. How come you're asking me about dogs, anyway?"

"Well," said the man, "we just got into town, and they told us the Oklahoma Boar has killed more dogs and wolves than anybody else they ever met."

The boar ran his fingers over one of his tusks. "I reckon. It's a scent thing, you understand. Men have no smell, they don't understand, but I bet you do, rat boy."

The rat scowled and grumbled.

"I got a smell to me," Oklahoma continued, "that dogs just don't like. Not adapted dogs, like the rat and I—smart dogs—but the animals. I mean to say, the smart ones don't like my smell either, but they can get over it. But your basic canine goes for my throat as soon as he scents me. Usually I can smell them coming, but that was a bad forest. Someone musta dropped a mutation bomb in there. There were funny trees and bushes, but especially there were some creepers about a half-mile off from the shack that stank so bad I couldn't use my nose for a week, 'cept to breathe." He gulped down the sour beer. Now, near as I can figure it, you're looking for someone who kills dogs and wolves. How come?"

"Well, let me explain," the man said. "My name is Bob Simmons. My friend's name is Nick. We're... sort of professional scouts. We work in Pennsylvania."

Oklahoma snuffed at his empty mug. "That's, what, about two weeks north of here by foot?"

"About," Simmons said. "We scout out bandit camps, map them, and sell the information to villagers who want to raid the camps themselves. I did army reconnaissance before the war, so this sort of work is pretty easy for me. Nick here... well, he needs the work too."

"I have a big family," the rat said.

"Reckon," Oklahoma replied. "Lot of pointy mouths to feed." He looked back at Simmons. "What's your business, then?"

"Our home village has been attacked by the worst kind of bandits," Simmons said.

"Cannibals?" Oklahoma asked. "I met some of them 'round Dallas once, on a dirt road going past an old farmhouse. I saw a bunch of drooling mutants in rags running at me; they saw bacon and pork chops. Best I could find out about 'em later, they had been in a bomb shelter but took a hit anyway, and...."

"Let's get on with this," said the rat. "These men aren't cannibals. They're slavers. They raided our village and took as many women as they could find. All human, no one with any visible mutations. We scouted out their camp. The only place we saw anyone moving was a barn; there was a guard sleeping on the ground in front of it. He was drunk, so we caught him easily, and he told us our women were in the barn. He said even though there were no bandits there but him, the only way in was around the other side, and it was guarded so well we'd be dead in seconds if we tried it. We cut his throat..."

"You bit it out," said Oklahoma. "Reckon."

"I'm not a savage!" the rat exclaimed shrilly.

"Heck, that's not savage," said Oklahoma. "Why shouldn't we use what God gave us to fight with? Don't you use your nose? Why not use your teeth?"

"Enough," interrupted Simmons. "We didn't believe what the guard said, so we started around to the entrance. Right about then a wind came up behind us, and almost immediately we heard two dogs barking. Now I've seen enlarged dogs like the one you told us about, and I've heard them bark. From the noise those two made, they must've been the size of horses."

"Shoot," said Oklahoma. "Never seen one that big."

"We heard them coming for us, and we ran back to the woods," Nick said.

"Did you see 'em?" Oklahoma said.

"We didn't turn around," Simmons said. "They were coming so fast, if they hadn't turned back to guard the barn, they could have run us down easily."

Oklahoma settled back, leaned his chair against the wall, and put his big cloven feet on the table. With one hand he groped in his pack for his pipe and tobacco. He looked at Simmons and Nick. Both of them smelled nervous, but he couldn't see them well; the room was dimly lit and full of smoke, and Oklahoma's vision had never been too good. "What you want," he said, "is for me to march into that town and kill those dogs for you. That right?"

The two nodded.

"That's presumin' that the slavers won't be there, right?"

They nodded again.

"Why didn't you just get your whole village together, arm 'em with guns and spears, and do it yourselves?"

"Do you want the job or not?" the rat snapped. "There's pay."

Oklahoma snorted. "Such as?"

"Artifacts," said Bob Simmons. "To start with, a case of canned goods; your choice, ham, tuna, corn... I don't even know what you like to eat."

"What else?" Oklahoma asked.

"A high-powered flashlight," Simmons said. "Two reloads of batteries."

"And?"

"You want more?" the rat spat. Oklahoma didn't smell anger on him; he was trying to hold out.

"You don't mind as much as you're sayin'," the boar observed.

"All right," said Bob Simmons in a tired voice. "How about an army surplus flak jacket. I have an extra, like the one I'm wearing, except it's never been used."

"Reckon I'll need that before we leave."

Simmons sighed. "Fine."

In the morning Oklahoma and the two scouts set out, following a highway that ran north-south past the small town where they had slept the night before. The boar took a long sniff of the air before departing; rain, and a heavy rain, was coming. He told his companions. Bob Simmons shrugged. "Less danger of bandits attacking if it's raining."

"Reckon," said Oklahoma.

Oklahoma set a quick pace. The other two were obviously in fit condition; they kept up with him for a few hours. When, around noon, Oklahoma noticed them dropping behind, he snorted with amusement. "Tired, huh?" he called back.

I saw a bunch of drooling mutants in rags running at me; they saw bacon and pork chops.

The rat growled back at him.

Black clouds filled the sky. Oklahoma, trudging through the grass beside the highway they were following, lost sight both of the sun—hidden behind the clouds—and of his two companions. He snorted and sat down at the roadside to wait. Gnats dove at his dark, squinting eyes. He snuffed the air again; on the wind, growing as the storm approached, he caught the scent of men and horses north of him, about a half-mile away. He kept sniffing, holding the scent as long as he could. Eventually Simmons and Nick appeared, sprinting up the highway toward him.

"Why didn't you wait?" the rat snarled.

Oklahoma said, "Like my own pace." When they turned to move on, he added, "Wait here a spell. People coming from the north, mounted or they have carts."

"I don't see anyone," Simmons said. "Wait a minute." He

dug through his pack and produced a set of binoculars. He gazed up the road for only a moment before saying, "Bad news. Centaurs."

"How many?" asked the rat nervously.

"Centaurs?" Oklahoma interrupted. "You mean, a horse's body with a man's chest coming off the front? Ain't never heard of them living before."

"There was a centaur clone series made before the war," Bob Simmons said. "They aren't usually friendly. With their speed, centaurs tend to be bandits. There's about six coming down the road toward us."

"Shoot," said Oklahoma. He looked around; on either side of the highway the terrain was flat and featureless. He still couldn't see the centaurs, but their scent was getting sharper. Suddenly he smelled tension.

"They've spotted us," Simmons said. "They've broken into a gallop."

"They killers?" Oklahoma asked.

"Only robbers, but they'll take everything we're carrying."

The boar shook his head. "I've been broke before and lived ok, but I don't like giving in to bandits. Y'all have any guns?"

"We're armed," Simmons said.

"Load 'em," Oklahoma said. "Get behind me, and don't fight until I do."

The scent of the angry centaurs grew stronger, and soon Oklahoma could hear their galloping hooves. Finally he saw a dark splotch on the highway ahead, and with some sniffing made out the positions of the six bandits.

The centaurs had drawn up in a semicircle, flanking Simmons and Nick. Sweat and rain were wet on their heaving flanks. They were less than full-sized, in horse or human parts; the smallest was about Oklahoma's height at the human shoulder. As with all clone series, they were very much alike in shape and coloration; different living had produced the only variations in them. The smaller one had probably had its growth stunted by poor nutrition, and the big one, the leader, had clearly done more exercise than the others.

"Reckon y'all came here in a hurry," Oklahoma said. "Didn't want to miss us."

"We don't want to talk to you, pig," the tallest one shouted arrogantly. "We want everything you're carrying, you and the man and the boy. Might as well strip naked and give us your clothes; you don't want us searching you."

Oklahoma snuffed at him. "You seem mighty proud. Reckon you're strong, huh?"

"Shut him up," the lead centaur said. He motioned with his hand to another one next to him. With clopping hooves the second creature came forward.

"I wouldn't come closer," the boar warned. The scent of fear from that one was too strong to miss.

The smaller centaur looked back at the leader, then advanced. Oklahoma shrugged and stepped forward.

The centaur reared and kicked with his front hooves. Oklahoma dodged one kick, but a flinty hoof caught him on the shoulder and twisted him a bit to the side. He felt blood leak onto his fur under the flak jacket.

"Let's see your armor stop that, pig," said the centaur.

"The armor's just for decoration," Oklahoma said. He closed his eyes, took a snuff, and lunged forward, snorting.

One hand closed on a foreleg; he squeezed and felt the leg snap. The centaur cried out in uncomprehending pain. Oklahoma gored at the underbelly of the centaur, tasted the blood on his lips and felt it in his snout as he slipped beneath the forelegs to wrap his arms around the heaving, blood-slick belly of the thing and slash with his tusks so that hide ripped and entrails slid along his snout. He heard gunshots; he lifted the centaur and hurled it forward, heard it smack wetly on the asphalt. On all sides were cold air and beating rain, blood and pain, shouts and shots. Oklahoma jumped at the nearest centaur he could smell, caught something—long hair?—pulled and gored—a scream and a snap followed, and a gout of blood hit Oklahoma's pelt. Through the centaurs' cries, horrible blends of shout and whinny, Oklahoma heard Bob Simmons exclaim, "Oh my God!" But when the centaur crumpled, Oklahoma jumped at a third, his senses filled with blood, then all the centaurs were in full flight, and Oklahoma stood with his eyes shut, snorting and clawing at the air, breaths swelling in his chest, until he could discern through the stench of death that none of the centaurs near him were alive.

"My God!" whispered Simmons. "What did we hire?"

Oklahoma stood as still as he could until the fighting frenzy passed. He did not listen to the exclamations of his two companions until he was composed. Then he turned and nodded to them. "Time to move on. Reckon."

Southern Pennsylvania was cooler, wetter country than Oklahoma was used to. Not as wet as Louisiana and Mississippi: it had rained on him for two days while he was climbing through the scarred ruins of New Orleans. But it was wetter than his native southwest, and much greener, too. Oklahoma liked the scent of pine, carried on a cool drizzly wind. Once they crossed into Pennsylvania, he began snuffing the air eagerly, searching out this aroma in particular. It kept him busy while he walked.

He talked as little as possible during the journey up with Bob Simmons and Nick the rat. Simmons had a strange smell to him, such as Oklahoma had never encountered before. But Nick... as usual he was clear enough: always angry and always scared, all the time, and none too clean. But Oklahoma made a lot of people feel that way; that was why he was a loner. As to this particular rat, what was wrong with him, really? "Heck," Oklahoma said to himself, "the way I fight is natural enough to me, but it might have scared him, right enough, if he was raised in a lab like he says." And he shrugged his sore shoulders and continued to march.

Two weeks' travel, mostly along the same asphalt road, brought them at last to a little village at the muddy bank of a great, brown, sluggish river.

"Susquehannah?" Oklahoma asked.

"Yes it is," said Bob Simmons. "We crossed here before; there's a bargeman here who'll take us across for a can of food or two."

"Looks like a trading village," the boar said. "Anyone use this river to carry goods?"

"I suppose so," the man replied.

"Safe river, then," Oklahoma said. "Some of 'em have bad

spots. Rio Grande has pirates; southern Mississippi has giant crocodiles. Reckon."

"I'm not particularly worried," Bob Simmons said. He led the way into the village. Here the asphalt was more heavily cracked, and built atop and around it were a series of wooden houses. Oklahoma snuffed the place, caught the scents of more than two dozen people and animals. As they moved on along the road, he began to see some of them. Most were human, and most were standing about looking at the newcomers. Oklahoma sniffed them individually, and decided most of them were clean. None smelled sick either. He nodded to himself. Good, safe town. No bandits here; no dogs either.

"Where's Sand?" Simmons asked of a heavy, unshaven man leaning against the wall of one of the larger shacks.

"He's inside," the man sneered.

"Tell him we have work for him," Nick said. "We need to get across the river immediately."

"You tell him," the man said insolently. "I don't run errands for animals, especially not rats."

Oklahoma snuffed at him.

"Get your nose away from me, pig," said the man.

"You're not too polite, boy," Oklahoma said. "Reckon. Not too smart either."

"You don't belong here, you stinking hog," the man replied. "If I had my way, I wouldn't even let Sand stay here."

Even as the fat man and Oklahoma stared at each other, Bob Simmons emerged from the bar, bringing with him a lithe, tall figure that Oklahoma recognized, even without smelling him, as a cat. He was wearing a vest that smelled like old leather and a pair of woolen shorts. His fur, as his name suggested, was a soft sandy color. Perked pink ears, whiskered nose, and slitted green eyes all focused immediately on Oklahoma and Nick, and he made a mild sniffing noise. Oklahoma thought his scent suggested curiosity.

"I remember you," the cat said to Nick in a mellow voice. "But you, Mr. Boar... you're new around these parts."

"Nothing wrong with that, if you don't hurt anyone who was leaving you alone," Oklahoma replied. "You're taller than most cats I've met. How come?"

"I'm part lion," Sand said. Abruptly he tilted his head up and scratched vigorously at his neck. "Jesus! You've given me fleas already," he said with another tilt of his head.

"Sorry," Oklahoma said. "Least they're not Pennsylvania fleas. Might have carried those things all the way from Alabama."

Sand licked his chops, revealing very white teeth. "Hrrrrm." He looked at Bob Simmons. "So you want to cross the river?"

"That's right."

"What do you have for me?"

Simmons pulled a can out of his pack and handed it to the cat.

"Hrrrm. Creamed corn? I don't like that." He casually flipped it back to Simmons.

"Don't waste time," Nick said. "Just give him the tuna and let's go."

"Tuna?" Sand said. "I'll bet they killed dolphins when they fished it out of the sea. It's morally outrageous."

"Will you take it, or not?" Nick snapped.

"I might swallow my outrage for two cans," suggested Sand.

"I hate cats," Nick grumbled as his partner fished two cans of tuna from among his belongings.

"You have poor taste," Sand said. He stowed the tuna in pockets inside his vest and stretched. "Let's go to the barge. I'm tired. Normally I'd be sleeping right about now."

The heavy man leaning against the wall straightened from his slouch and stood with his arms akimbo. Into the sudden silence he proclaimed loudly, "I'd like to put you to sleep for good, like they used to do at the pound."

He could hear his own vulgar snorting sounds, the cold sweat beading on his fur; he slipped, rolled, scrambled to his feet and ran on, sniffing, sniffing.

Sand yawned. "A very sophisticated observation, Jack. Every day you remind me why I like your company so much."

"Don't try talking smart to me," the man shouted. He reached around to his backside and pulled out a folding knife.

"Ought to put that away," Oklahoma said.

Pawing at the knife with his fat fingers, Jack drew out a short, hard blade and pointed it at Oklahoma.

"Put it away, Jack," Sand said. "I've been faster than you since we were boys."

"You're gonna die, pussycat," Jack said, and swung his knife.

Oklahoma started to lunge at him, but Sand was faster. A shrill, inhuman growl escaped his throat, even as with his right paw he knocked Jack's knife-arm away, and with his left he dealt the big man a savage claw to the face.

Jack screamed and fell face-down. His blood pulsed rapidly into the cracks in the asphalt.

"We'd better go," Sand said. "His brothers are meaner than he is, and they might have guns." He leapt over Jack's writhing form and scampered toward the river.

"Been a long day already," Oklahoma said. "Going to get longer." Panting hoarsely, he jogged along behind the others with his hooves clopping on the highway.

The barge was broad—large enough to carry a horse cart—and made of wet pine logs. As Sand poled them out into the Susquehannah, he asked, "It might be a poor idea for me to return there. Do you mind if I... er, follow you for a while?"

"You ever done any travelling?" Oklahoma asked.

"Not much. I grew up in that little village."

"Reckon you'll get a chance to do some now," the boar told him. He turned to Simmons and Nick. "Cats are quiet—fast too, got good night vision. Other senses are good too. You could use one in your business."

Simmons, who was still panting from the run to the barge, gave Oklahoma a pained expression. "We'll discuss it later," he said.

The stony brook was shallow enough for all of them to wade. Sand protested violently when he was told their intention to

do so—but he gave in when he saw that, with his natural agility, he could travel along it stepping mainly on flat brown rocks, rarely immersing his legs at all.

On either side of them were steep hillsides dotted with aromatic pines and other trees. This stream wound along the valley and past the hill on which the slavers' camp was set. The woods on either side were heavy enough to afford them cover as,leaving the stream, they crept through the trees and up the slope. On their previous trip here, Simmons and Nick had discovered a thick copse of bushes near the crest of the hill from which they could both observe the camp and come at the barn from behind.

As they proceeded, treading carefully across fallen needles and stepping around acorn nuts and woody pine cones, Oklahoma took slow, quiet, deep sniffs of the area. He could get nothing from the camp around which they were moving; the wind was against him, and all he smelled, besides the agreeable forest scents, were the odors of his three companions. Nick, as always, was sour with tension; Sand, as always, was cool and relaxed; and Bob Simmons was... odd, not like any man the boar had ever scented before. He had not been that way at first... how, why the change?

The first building Oklahoma saw, through the trees, was small and brown. He took a powerful sniff and winced.

"That's an outhouse, idiot," Nick whispered.

"Reckon," Oklahoma said lamely.

Only moments later, the four lay side by side atop soft pine needles, looking down the hill at a wide, tall building with a sharply sloping roof.

"There's the barn," Simmons whispered. "I don't see anyone nearby it, but you can bet the dogs are on the other side."

"What happened to the slavers you say live here?" Sand asked. "Haven't they been gone an awfully long time, if you've been down to Virginia and back since you last found them gone?"

"Don't tell us our business," Nick replied. "You're only here because Oklahoma insisted."

"Okay," the boar said. "You want me to charge around the barn and fight those two giant dogs, and meanwhile you two lead the women across the camp and down the hill. Right?"

"That's what we hired you for," Nick snapped. "We'll be ready with our guns."

"Hold on," Oklahoma said. He sniffed heavily. The outhouse imposed itself upon his senses, but he sniffed deeper, sorted out other, less potent scents. There was a canine scent, certainly, and even the muffled smell of a group of people. But something seemed wrong. "There's only one dog," he concluded.

"Maybe one of them escaped," was the rat's reply. "Will you do what we hired you for, or not?"

Oklahoma looked at Sand. The tawny cat shrugged.

"Reckon," said Oklahoma. He handed his pack to Sand, closed his eyes, drew the dog's scent deep into his nostrils. His limbs tensed, and his breaths came quicker. He barely felt the brush rake his hide as he broke from the copse and charged down the slope, kicking up needles and cones with each cloven-hoofed step. He could hear his own vulgar snorting sounds, the cold sweat beading on his fur; he slipped, rolled, scrambled to his feet and ran on, sniffing, sniffing.

Even as he reached level ground, his snorts were answered by a long, low howl. Then came a second. His rage redoubled, and he leapt toward the howling, and even as his body collided with that of his foe, he opened his eyes and saw a creature twice his size, a monster dog eight feet high and six feet broad, standing on its hind legs, with matted black hair and two slavering heads.

Even as he collided with it, the dog caught him by the shoulders and hurled him away. He tumbled over the rocky ground head over heels, rolled, came up, and charged again, snorting, but even berserk, he noticed its dark eyes even as it barked furiously at him. Looked like his own eyes, sort of....

He slashed with his tusk, drew blood and tasted fur. The dog struck him a vicious backhand, so that again he tumbled away and sprang to his feet. He drew several heavy breaths, prepared to charge again.

What about those eyes? They were weaving left and right, why?

Because the dog was shaking its heads and gesturing with its hands.

Oklahoma calmed his breathing. This wasn't right. He was supposed to fight a dog, wasn't he? But this thing wasn't just a dog. It was an adapted animal like him, even if it couldn't speak. He tasted the bloody fur still in his mouth.

"Hold on," he said. "You're clean. That's not something dogs usually worry about."

The dog shook both heads again.

"And you're not chained up, either."

No acknowledgement. This was obvious.

"And you don't fight like a dog. If you did, you would have kept coming for my throat till one of us was dead."

The dog nodded vigorously.

"All the same, I think we're gonna have to fight," Oklahoma said. "I never had much stomach for slavers, and that includes their watchdogs. The women in there have to go home."

The dog waved its hands wildly. Then it sprang to the barn door and rapped. There was a loud scraping sound from within, as of a crossbar being lifted, and the barn door opened a crack. A hairless face appeared in the crack; a woman, Oklahoma decided, noting her human smell.

"You're friends with this dog?" Oklahoma asked her. "The story as I heard it was he was guarding the barn for some slavers to keep you from being rescued."

"Who are you?" the woman asked in a frightened voice.

"The Oklahoma Boar. Some scouts from your home village hired me to kill this here watchdog and set you free."

"Set us free?" she said incredulously. "This dog is protecting us from them. He's from the cerberus clone series—trained to be a guard. The slavers are all afraid of him; they probably hired you themselves."

"If the slavers are gone, how come you haven't left?"

"This is the only place he can protect us," she said. "If we tried to leave, the bandits could attack us from every side. Anyway, we have food here. Our husbands and children are all dead—where do we have to go?"

"Wait a minute—then who were all those men I met back at the village?"

"Slavers," she said.

"Reckon they could have been slavers, since I didn't see any children. Cerberus clone, eh?" he directed to the dog.

The dog nodded.

"Won't leave the door, huh?"

The dog shook its heads.

Oklahoma responded by tossing his own. "I don't like being tricked. Those men were supposed to circle around the other side of the barn and..." he sniffed. The dog, the woman, the other women inside the barn filled his senses, but he also picked up the smells of his three travelling companions, very nearby.

At the moment he heard the click of Bob Simmons' gun, he realized why the man smelled strange.

"You're maskin' your scent with somethin'," he said as he turned to look at the man, who was standing at the corner of the barn opposite the crack in the door. He held a heavy shotgun. Beside him stood Nick the rat, his hooded robe cast away, holding a machine pistol.

"You bet I am," Simmons said. "As soon as you told me you could tell by scent when someone was afraid, I started wearing cologne. Wearing too much, I guess you should say."

"Reckon," Oklahoma said. "That's a mean-looking gun. You planning to use it on us?" He looked askance at the cerberus, which had already began to snarl doubly in its meaty throats.

"I'm going to love killing you, pig," Nick said with a rodent smile. "I'm tired of your stench in my nose all the time and your garbled hick voice in my ears."

"Sorry to hear that," Oklahoma said. "But I feel good, knowin' I never liked you, either."

The dog took a step forward, only to be met with the barrel of Simmons' shotgun. "We had extra weapons cached in another building," the man said, "but you would have stopped us from getting close enough to dig them up. This stupid boar distracted you for the time it took."

"Where's Sand?" Oklahoma asked.

"We sent that idiot to scout on down the hill," Nick said. "He's probably half a mile away now. You're going to die." He aimed the pistol at Oklahoma's heart. "That flak jacket won't save you, either," he added with a smirk.

As Nick squeezed the trigger, the cerberus suddenly leapt in front of Oklahoma, struck the barn door with all his weight so that it slammed shut. Bullets ripped through his huge chest; blood fountained from his back, and one bullet struck Oklahoma in his shoulder, just where the centaur had kicked him two weeks before.

The force of the impact spun Oklahoma around and slammed him against the side of the barn. His breaths quickened, and he could barely hear the sad whimpering of the dying guard dog as he rushed at the two slavers, felt soft fur brush across his head before he slammed into Bob Simmons and knocked him off his feet. There was a catlike hiss and an answering squeak, and Oklahoma smelled Sand nearby, and the scent of Nick's blood mingled with that of the dying cerberus and that of Oklahoma himself, and then metal struck Oklahoma in the head, and the boar thrashed so that his tusks stuck in some type of tough fabric, like a flak jacket. Off on the side, in the dirt, Nick squealed as Sand clawed at him. Oklahoma scrabbled with his long-nailed hands, felt nothing but clods of dirt, and the metal object struck him in the head again. Oklahoma swung blindly, hit it, felt it fly away and heard Bob Simmons scream when Oklahoma's other swiping hand began to rip at his scalp....

"I like rooftops," Sand said. "No one ever looks for me on them, and I can sleep in peace. I never thought one day I'd use a roof to ambush someone."

"Good idea," Oklahoma said. "Reckon. Well, we've got some useful things from these two: canned food, and guns and armor, a flashlight, and a good set of binoculars. The rest of the slavers will be lookin' for us soon. We ought to take what we have and go."

One of the women was wrapping Oklahoma's bloodied shoulder with a clean rag. Sand was almost unmarked—all he had was a small rat-bite on one paw.

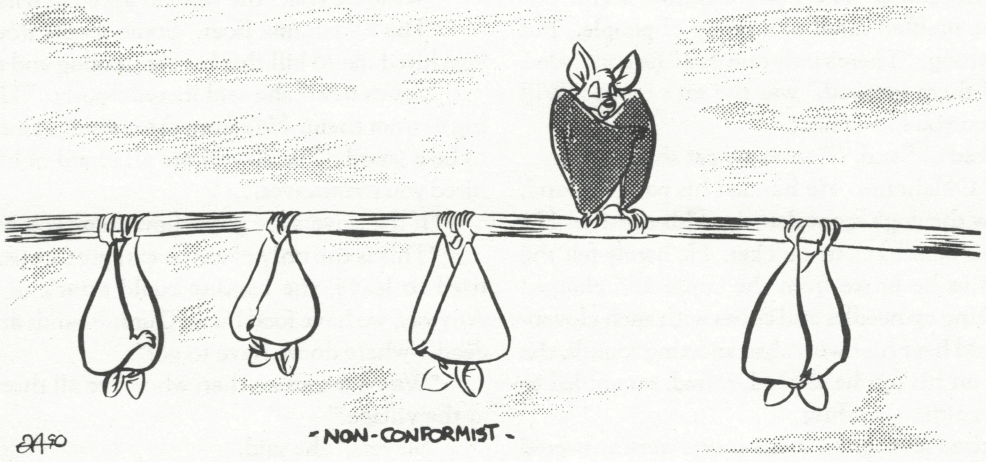
"Where can we go?" the cat asked one of the women.

"There's another village eastward along the stream, just at the edge of the hills," she replied. "They might shelter us for awhile."

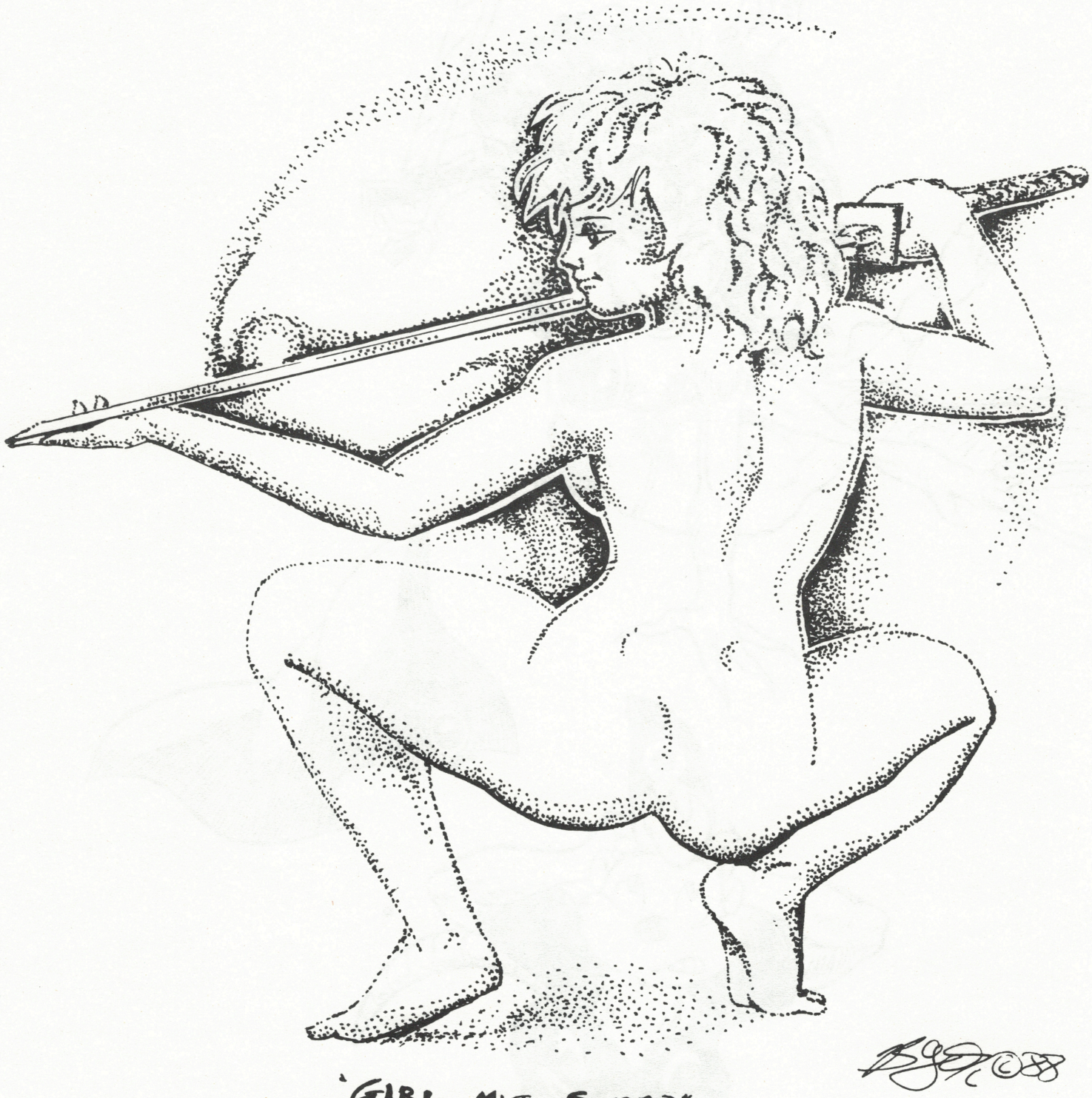
"We got enough barter goods to persuade them," Oklahoma said. "East," he added. "Haven't gone that direction a while, 'cept to get to this hill."

"You don't really care where you go, do you?" Sand asked. "If there's food there, I mean."

"Nope," said Oklahoma. "It's a big world. Lots of things to smell." ❑







"GIRL MIT SWORD"

Of Storm and Furry, Chapter 2

Contemporary Past

Lawrence M. Schoen

There's really a good deal of misunderstanding on the topic. You need to realize that the Speaker doesn't actually summon the dead back from any form of afterlife. Rather, she creates an amalgam of the person, usually as he was near the time of his death. The process involves summoning up sufficient portions of the deceased's nefshons, which allows a reconstruction of his personality, memory, and self image. From the point of view of the deceased the first summoning is full of confusion. It's not uncommon for the Speaker to be mistaken, at least initially, for GOD. Hysterical behavior of the conversant is not surprising. For this reason a Speaker normally limits her conversations to a handful of individuals with whom she's become well acquainted, and perhaps even knew in their lives.

— Jorl ben Tral, *Conversations in the Dark*

One of the most profound results of Jorl's time in the Patrol had been a newfound appreciation for home cooking. No matter how many spans he had spent with Winismok, the Urs chef, no matter how earnestly he had tried to train the meals sub-computer, somehow the food never came out quite right. It was only upon returning home to Barsk, to the island of Keslo, and the seemingly endless string of welcoming suppers with friends and relatives, that Jorl came to know the gourmand that had been hidden inside him.

He sat alone now in the smooth curve of the tiny alcove Tolta kept for him, a permanent invitation in her home. Jorl's belly was full, having enjoyed seconds of an exquisite loaf of chut and rangul delicately seasoned with the imported spices Tolta knew he favored. Sitting there he looked for all the world like a fellow who, after a satisfying meal, curls up in a favored spot and treats himself to a light nap. Appearances aside, he was not asleep. Though his eyes were all but closed, his face slack, his body limp, Jorl was much engaged in a very animated conversation.

In his mind he was in the same place, seated comfortably in the little alcove. His hands gesturing wildly, his trunk describing swift tight curves, punctuating his remarks. Standing in front of him in the empty room was another Fant. The other was a bit taller, though a year or two younger. He seemed quite comfortable leaning against the opposite wall of the alcove, his attention fixed upon Jorl and his narrative.

"I tell you, it was the most amazing thing I'd ever seen! It was as though it was at one and the same time an intelligent machine and the local tree's idiot. I can still hear it, chanting over and over again that same phrase—*kekiireidesir*—in that hideously imploring voice. I swear, Arlo, I'm convinced it was an artifact from Before."

"So what happened?"

"Mardukma blew it up," sighed Jorl. "He just aimed a projector at it and squeezed the trigger and kept at it until it had all either bubbled away or melted to slag. I couldn't believe it, I'd thought part of the purpose of the Patrol was to salvage such devices and he goes and blows it up."

"So what happened?"

"I threatened to report him to Central, to file a full report on his deliberate destruction of a possible artifact. You know what he did? He just laughed at me, in that sickening smirk some of those Cans have. He just shook his head, laughed, and said, 'We were never here, Dicknose, we were never here.' "

Arlo glanced away then, trying to hide a smile. "So what happened?"

"Nothing. All the others backed him up, even Winismok. I couldn't believe it. I filed my report anyway and Central just sent it back stamped *unverifiable*."

"You know," drawled Arlo, pulling away from the wall, "maybe you were just too much the historian for them, too stuck in the past."

Jorl looked up then, his hands and trunk at last still, and grinned. "That's a rather odd notion, especially coming from you."

Arlo just shrugged. He leaned back against the wall, seeming to settle into place again. Quite suddenly he moved forward and slapped at Jorl with his trunk, barely stopping the blow in time. Jorl recoiled backwards, banging his head on the wall of the alcove.

"That's two for flinching," chuckled Arlo, leaning back against the wall. "Besides, what makes you think it was an artifact, anyway? Just sounds like a computer with a bad language chip to me."

"But that's just it," replied Jorl, rubbing his head. "What if it wasn't a bad language chip, but a *different* language altogether? Hadn't you ever wondered how we all seem to speak the same general language but that most xenos have subvocabularies that are radically different? Where did those words come from? Was there more than one way of speaking Before?"

"Huh." Arlo tugged absently at his right ear. "Another language? What would such a thing sound like?"

"Maybe like 'kekiireidesir.' "

"Maybe," agreed Arlo. "So what happened?"

"Nothing really. Not long after that I received word of your death and they discharged me as your Second. You know, if you hadn't killed yourself it's just possible I'd have been able to make a difference out there."

Arlo shrugged. "I had my reasons."

Though he knew it was pointless, Jorl asked him again, as he almost always did during every chat. "But you still won't tell me?"

"No." Arlo looked away. "I'm sorry, Jorl, really. I can't."

Jorl was about to reply when he felt a hand shaking him by the shoulder someplace else. Focusing his attention back in the physical world, Jorl felt a strange sense of dislocation looking up at Tolta as she stood in the small room, just as Arlo stood in the same and different room not an ear's width and a universe away.

"I'm sorry Jorl, but Küv insisted. He says you promised to tell him a story before he went to sleep."

Jorl smiled to himself as he sat up and wiped from his chin the puddle of drool Speaking always produced. Ever since Arlo's death Tolta had been unable to deny her son anything. With a wry chuckle to himself, Jorl wondered how he would have grown up had Farthna been half so lenient with him.

"She's there now, isn't she?" Arlo moved from the wall, leaning in closely, conspiratorially, almost whispering. "I know that look, you always had that look when she entered a room. That's the hardest thing about being dead, you know, you're the only one I ever get to see. Tell me, Jorl, please, how is she?"

"She's beautiful, Arlo, you know that, as beautiful as when you last saw her this morning."

"Ahh," sighing he eased back against the wall. "This morning to me, and more than two years ago to her. I'll never understand that, my friend; it's hard enough seeing you so much older, so much different."

Though his eyes were all but closed, his face slack, his body limp, Jorl was much engaged in a very animated conversation.

"He's here now, isn't he?" Tolta bent over him, a delicate emotion lighting her face for an instant and then vanishing. "You have the same look on your face you always had when I'd catch the two of you in one of your foolish games. How is he, Jorl? Can you tell me?"

The eerie duality of reality thrummed through him like a minor chord and Jorl had to pause a moment to be certain which side he was replying to. "He's fine, Tolta, just as you remember him; he sends his love."

Jorl reached out, in both phases, and felt his loved ones grasp his hand, feeling reassured that they somehow managed to touch one another in the process.

"Tell her, Jorl, tell her I'm sorry, will you?"

"She knows that, Arlo, we all do. I have to go now, your son is demanding a bedtime story."

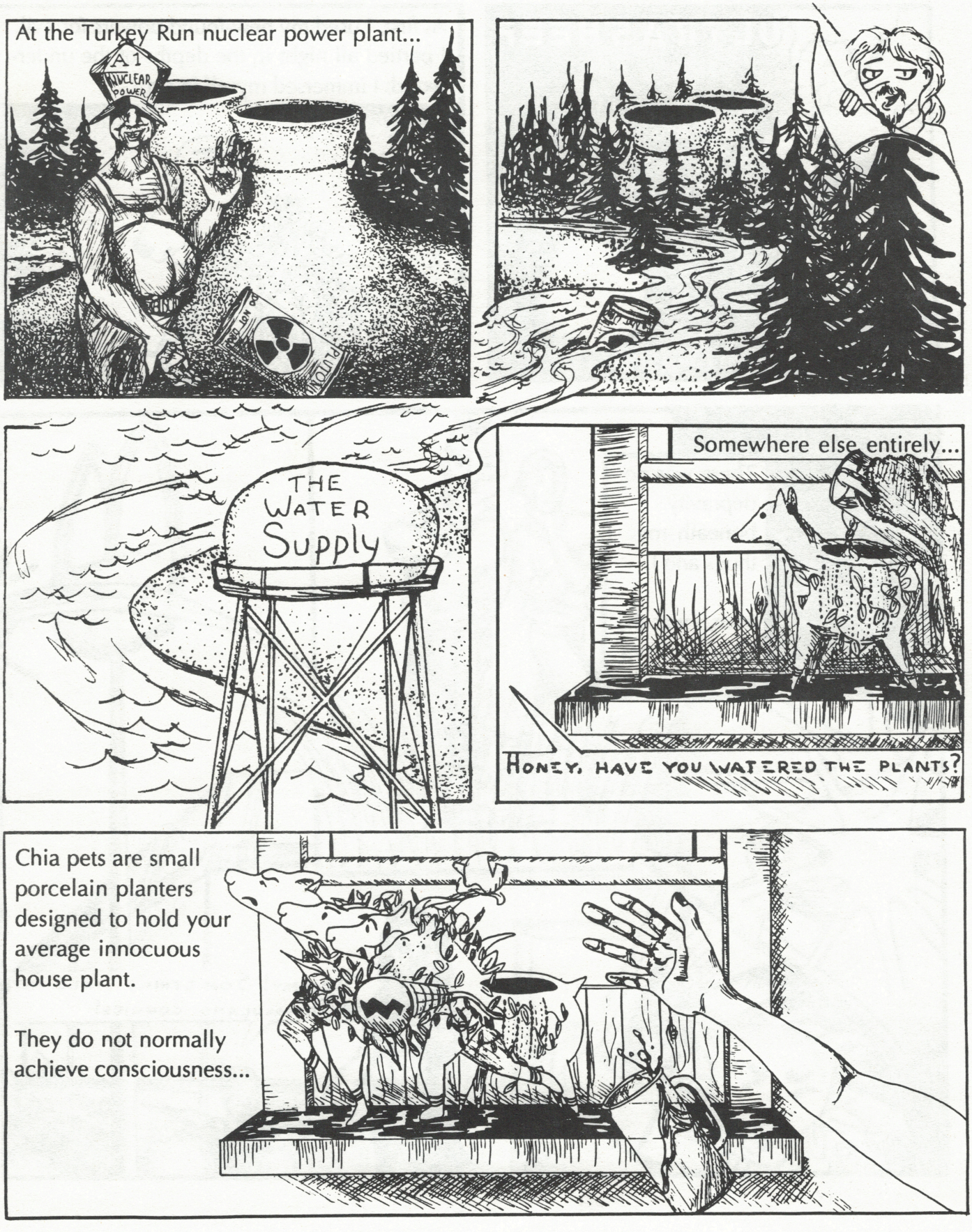
As he went through the exercises and patterns to disperse his friend's nefshons Jorl nodded his farewell.

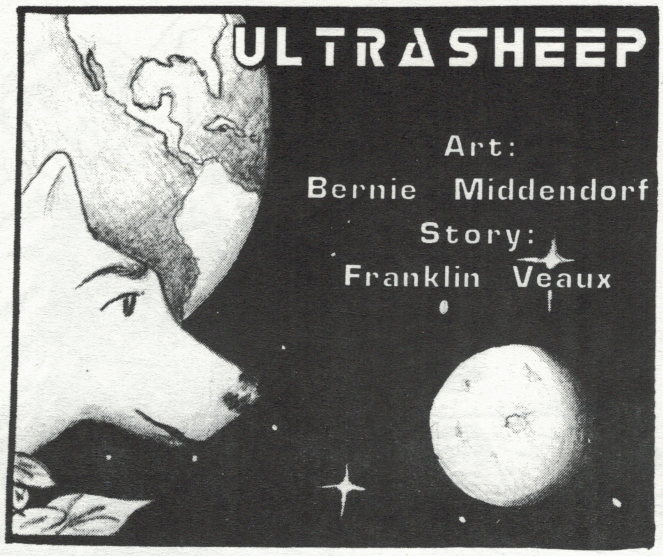
"Tell him about Pholo, Jorl, he always loved hearing about...." And he was gone.

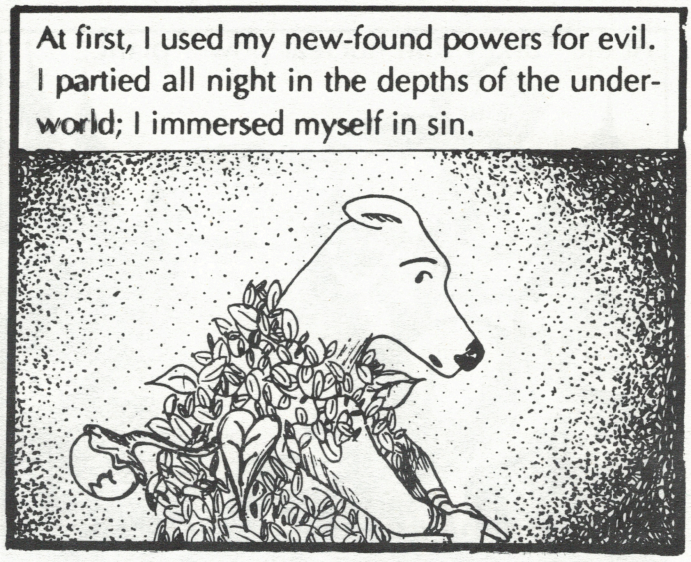
With a shiver and a shake of the head, reality returned to only a single frame of existence again. As he got up, a small blur of child-sized Fant pushed its way past Tolta and threw itself upon Jorl. Swinging Küv up to his shoulder, Jorl smiled again, and followed Tolta out of the alcove and around to the boy's room. As Küv's trunk circled tightly around his left ear for the ride Jorl began his tale of a legend of Barsk, knowing it would end with the hero's enlightenment and the child's slumber.

"Whilom, Küv, oh so very long ago, there lived a Fant named Pholo, and he possessed the gift of flight. While all others walked or ran, skipped or jogged, Pholo soared through the passways of the civilized wood like a purposeful leaf on the edge of a storm...." ❑

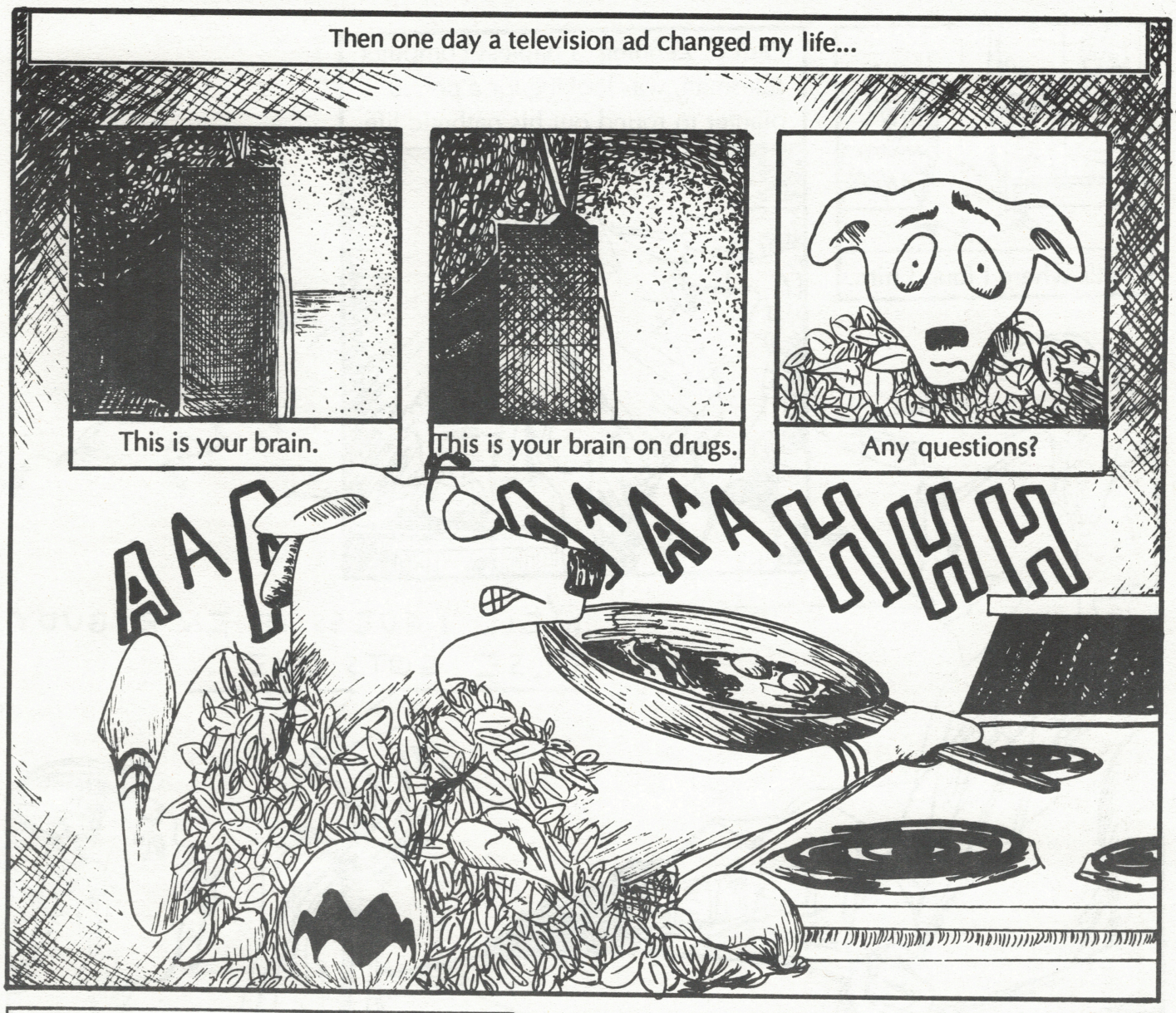
HEY KIDS! CAN YOU NAME THE AMERICAN ICONS BEING PARODIED IN ULTRASHEEP? LOOK CLOSE!

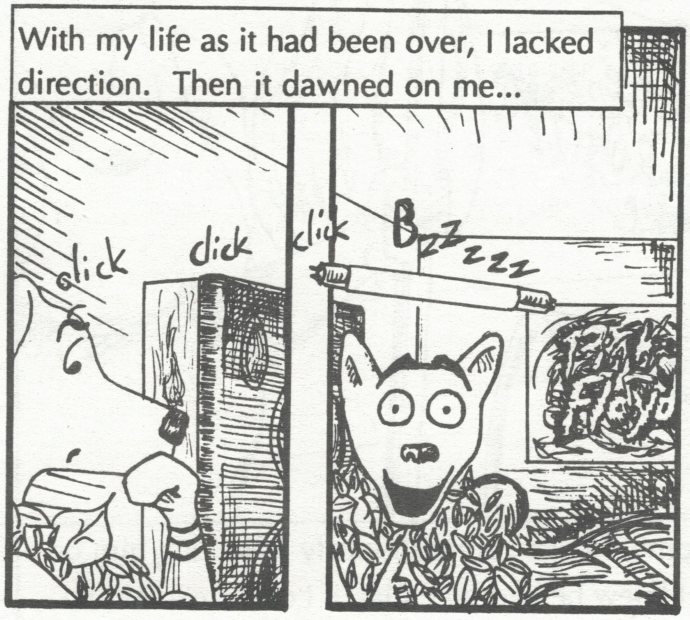


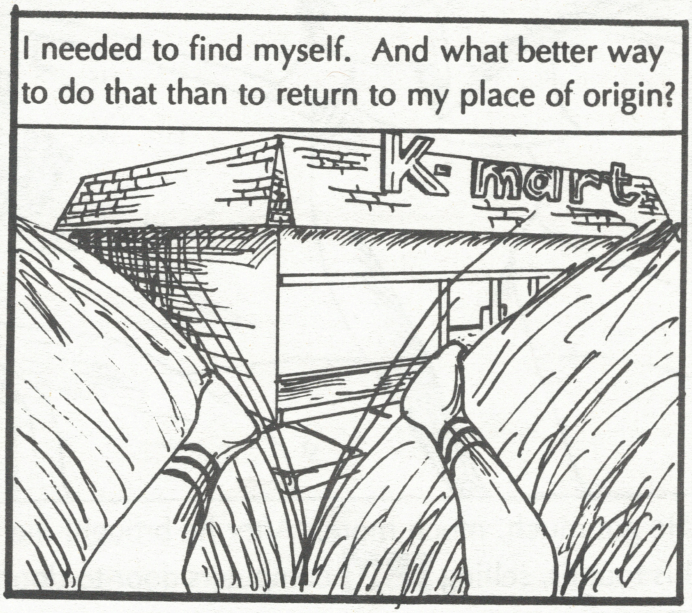

ULTRASHEEP
Art:
Bernie Middendorf
Story:
Franklin Veaux


At first, I used my new-found powers for evil. I partied all night in the depths of the underworld; I immersed myself in sin.


There was no depravity beneath my thugs and I.
Man, I was the Chia pet from Hell!
RUSTLE RUSTLE RUSTLE
MOMMY! SOMETHING STOLE MY McDONALDLAND COOKIES!
RUSTLE RUSTLE


Then one day a television ad changed my life...
This is your brain.
This is your brain on drugs.
Any questions?
AAAAAAHHH

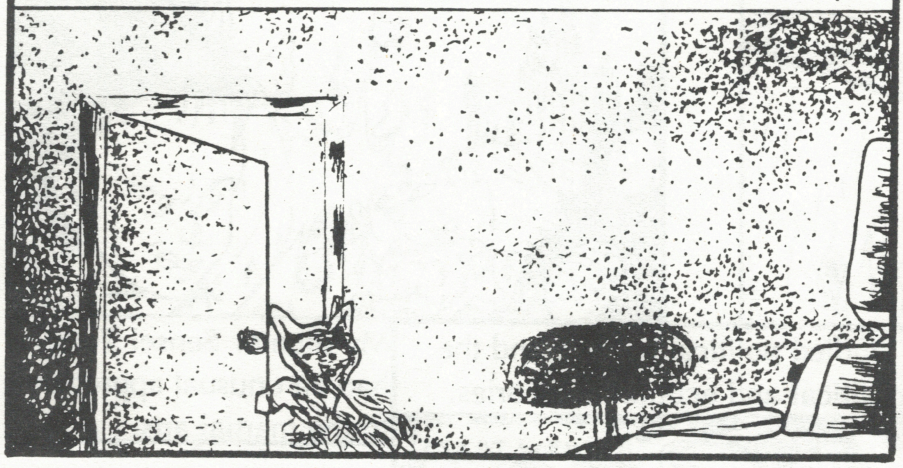

With my life as it had been over, I lacked direction. Then it dawned on me...
click
click
click
Bzzzzz


I needed to find myself. And what better way to do that than to return to my place of origin?
K-mart

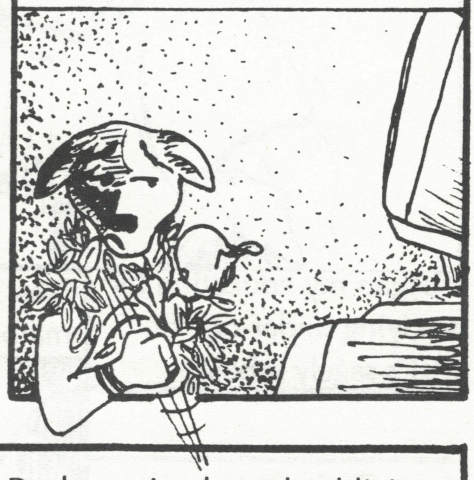


He got much, much more. After he brought me home, I began surreptitiously following him on his rounds, selling IBM computers door-to-door. I knew he had potential, if I could exploit it...

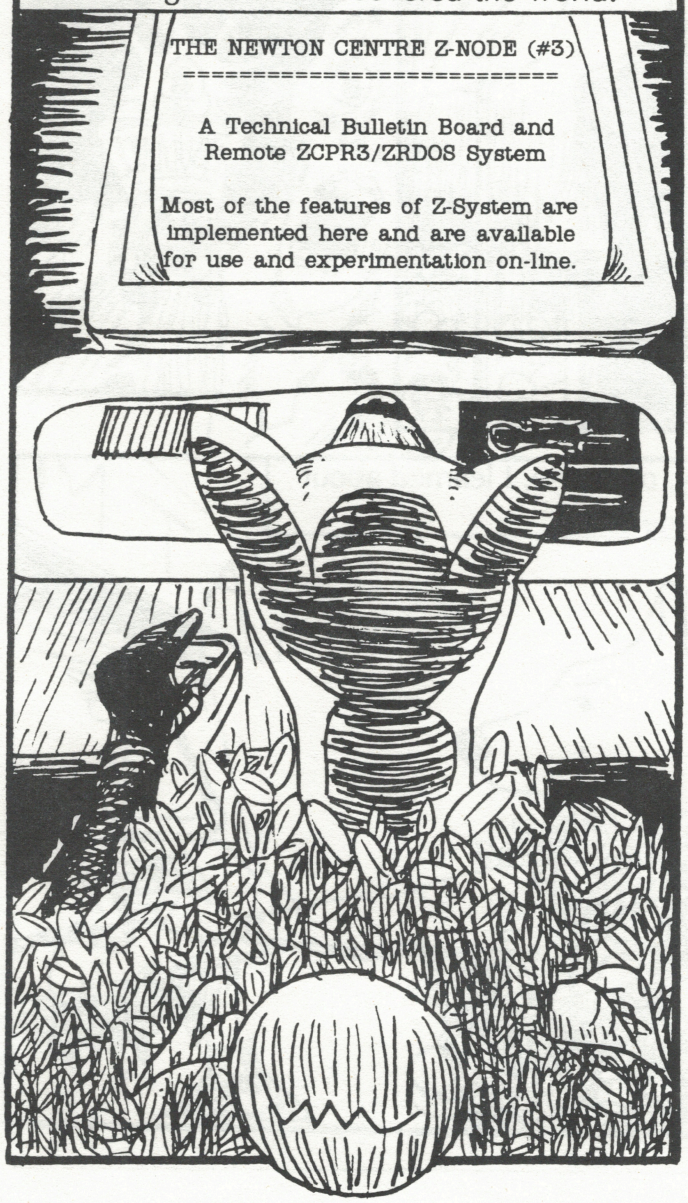
In the meantime, I began to familiarize myself with his machines. I felt a strange affinity for them, a kind of kinship.



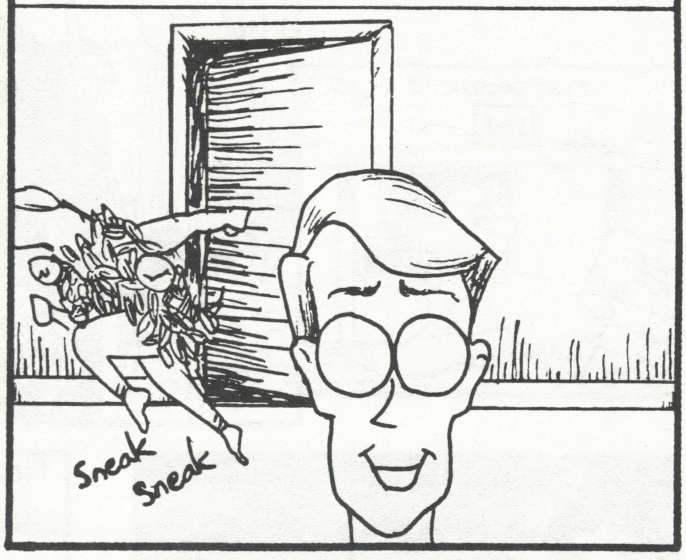
I soon became disenchanted. I needed more than they could possibly ever offer.



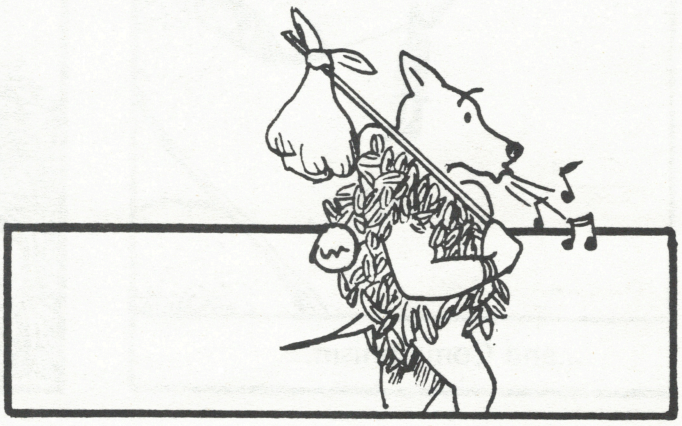
They still made adequate terminals, though, and through them I discovered the world.



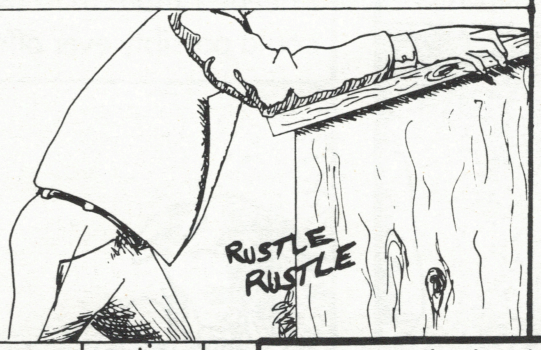
All the while, Paul remained utterly oblivious.



The time came for me to depart, and discover firsthand what the world had to offer.



Initially, I worked on expanding my mind.

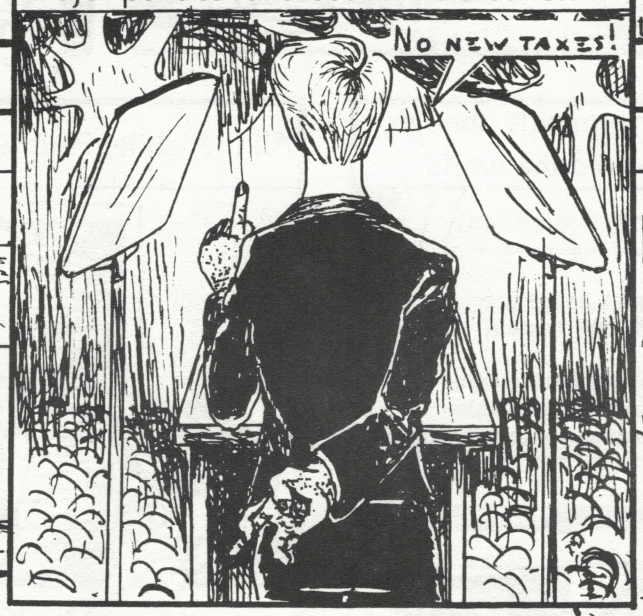


Then I learned the gentle art of self-defense.



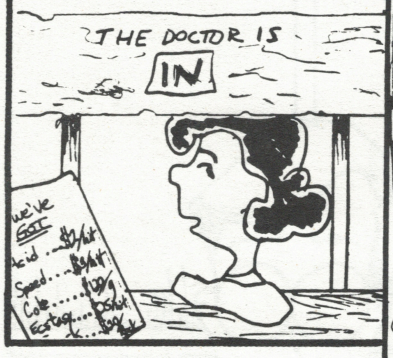
I began my education by studying under one of MIT's sagely scholars.

Next, I studied political science and the major political and economic theories.



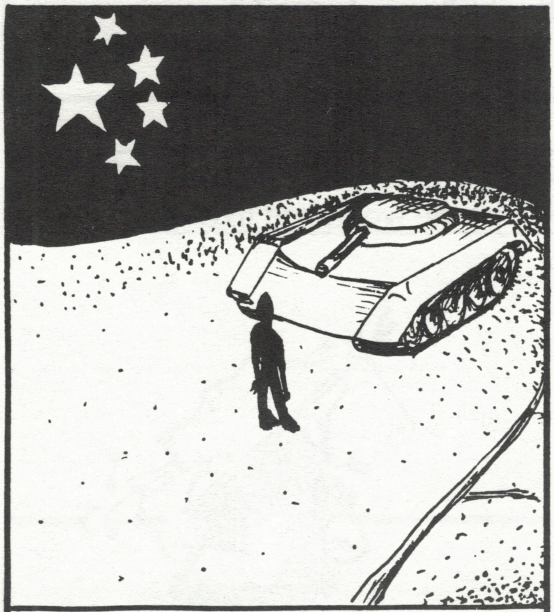
My mentor Sensei Tetsuo had an unusual approach to the martial arts.

Capitalism...



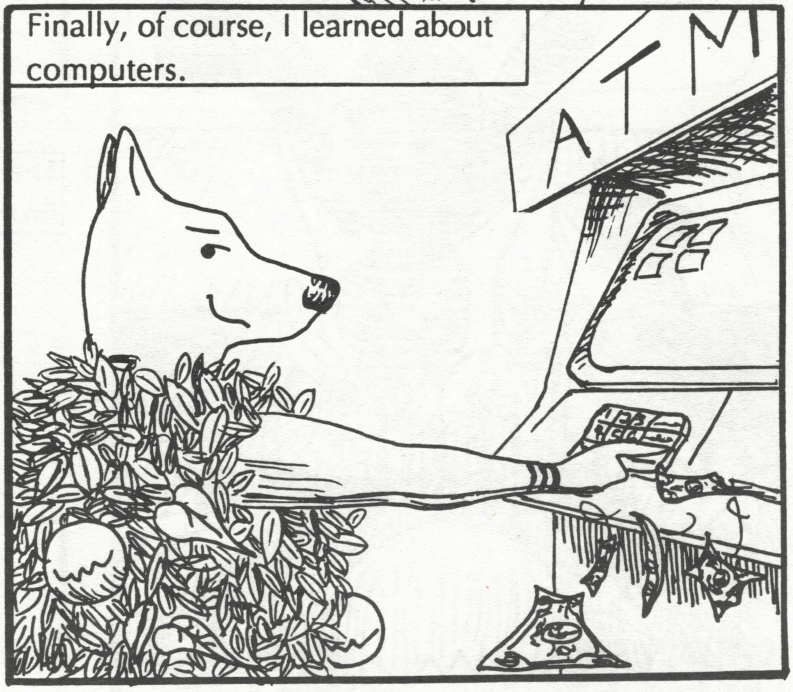
Socialism...

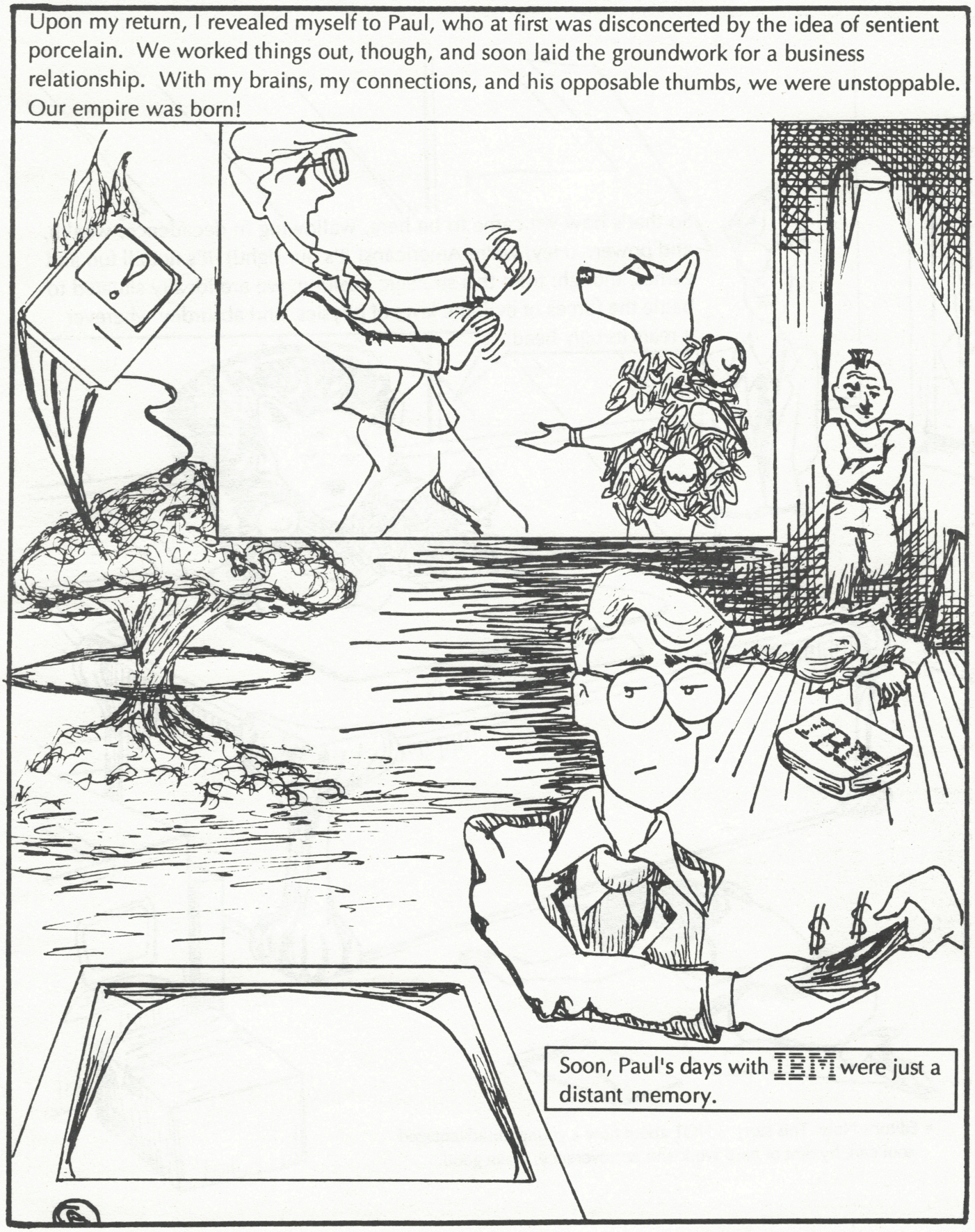


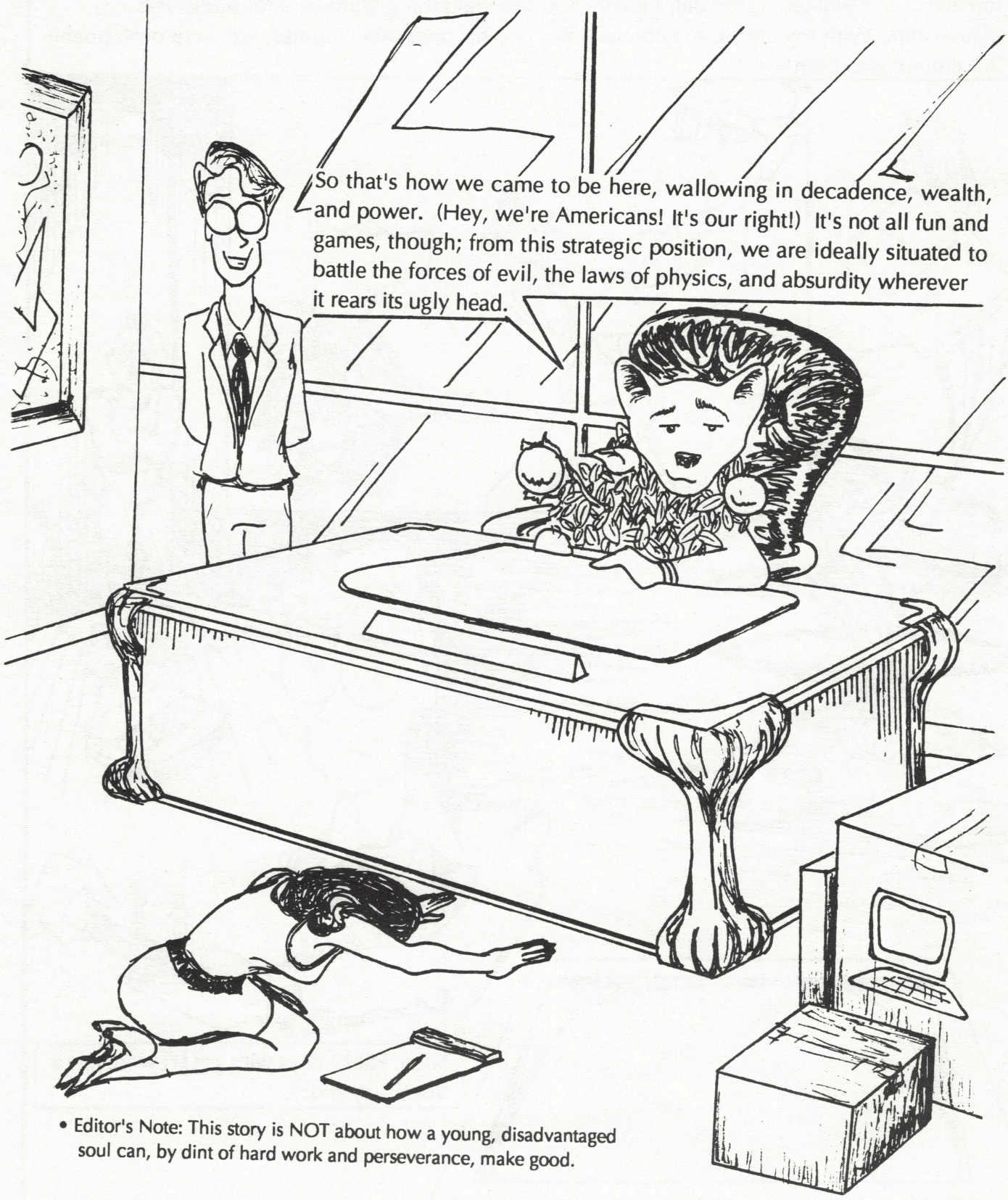


...and Communism.

Finally, of course, I learned about computers.




Upon my return, I revealed myself to Paul, who at first was disconcerted by the idea of sentient porcelain. We worked things out, though, and soon laid the groundwork for a business relationship. With my brains, my connections, and his opposable thumbs, we were unstoppable. Our empire was born!
Soon, Paul's days with IBM were just a distant memory.



• Editor's Note: This story is NOT about how a young, disadvantaged soul can, by dint of hard work and perseverance, make good.

OVERHEARD

Dammit, Jim, I'm a doctor, not a Unix hacker! -- Todd Sleeman

Life is like a sewer. What you get out of it depends on what you put into it. -- Tom Lehrer

So, how would you relate Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle to information storage and retrieval? -- An anonymous biker ex-con in Perkins' Pancake House, eavesdropping on a conversation between "Mythagoras" staff & groupies

In America, our freedoms are sacred, and we need harsh laws to protect them. -- Letter to the Editor in the somewhat conservative tabloid "Crime Lines"

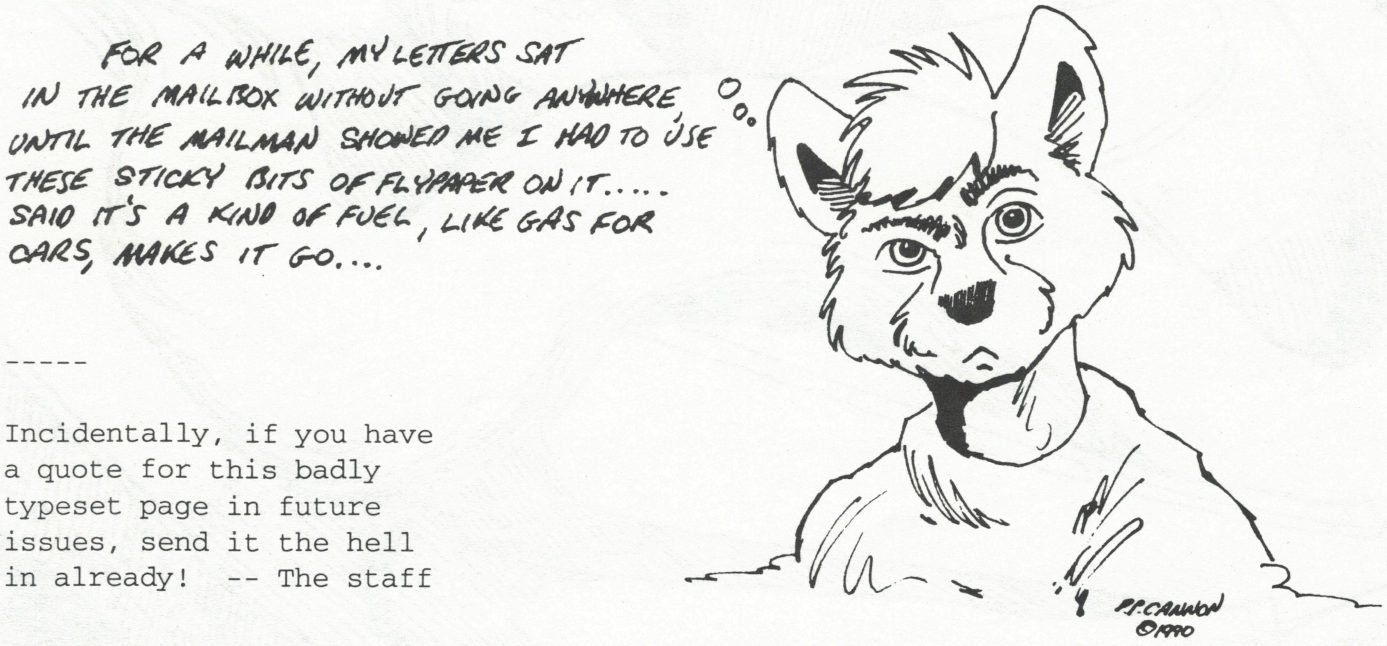
Only in an Aircel comic will you see a nipple cast a shadow several inches long. -- Buddy Saunders

You spent WHAT on producing this issue? You know, Monika Livingston says you're a blockhead. -- Maggie de Alarcon, to Bill Biersdorf

What do you mean we "accidentally erased the OVERHEARD.TXT file?" -- The Mythagoras staff

FILE NOT FOUND -- The computer

Oh, you mean I wasn't supposed to erase that? -- Tyler Robinson



Incidentally, if you have a quote for this badly typeset page in future issues, send it the hell in already! -- The staff



Travelling Music

Watts Martin

In the first half of "Travelling Music":

Spencer, a young college student going to school in South Florida, often drives deserted roads late at night for relaxation. During a drive down State Road 72 between Sarasota and Arcadia, he comes across an attractive female hitchhiker walking down the road, thirty miles from anywhere. Stopping, however, he discovers she is not human, but a golden-furred, humanoid cat. After convincing himself she is not a hallucination—and convincing her that he is real, too—they talk. Reli is from a parallel world, much like our own, but where cats evolved into sapience, not primates. Spencer drives her back to the point where she had abandoned her expensive sportscar after running out of gas, apparently at the point she entered our world. After realizing she literally has nowhere else to go, Reli accompanies Spencer back to his house for the night, taking his bed while he sleeps on the couch.

In the morning, the two drive their cars back to the "entrance point." They discover a mysterious silver-black disc embedded in the ground, which had been hidden under brush for untold years until Reli had driven her Porsche into the thicket. Neither brainstorming nor blind poking causes the disc to do anything, however, and Reli suggests perhaps it is some sort of solar-powered device that stores energy during the day, only becoming active in darkness. This leaves her with a full day to kill on a different earth, populated by what she perceives as "anthropomorphic humans" (for humans are small, dog-sized pet animals on her world). The end of the first half finds Reli and Spencer driving to West Palm Beach (what would be her hometown) in her Porsche. Spencer is trying to keep her mind off her uncertain and somewhat bleak situation, and trying to keep his own mind off his growing attraction—both emotional and physical—to the "cat-woman." Reli has just pulled back onto the 55 mile-per-hour state road, already going 80 and still accelerating.

"HELP," I SAID, CHECKING MY BELT AGAIN. RELI LEVELLED off her speed at 130. "Is that thing in miles per hour?"

"Yes."

I looked out the window. The cypress swamp was almost a blur; I looked back to see the rear end of a pickup truck approaching in our lane. The turn signal came on a split second before Reli switched lanes; there was just enough time to see the face of a befuddled hick behind the wheel before we were back in the correct lane and the front of the truck was rapidly receding in the rearview mirror. "You know, we just passed him with a greater relative speed than his actual one." Reli flashed me an amused *isn't it great?* expression. "Okay, fine," I sighed. "Do you drive like this all the time?"

"It makes the road go by faster."

Yes, by a factor of two. I stared back out at the window Well, I had always fantasized about a car that could go that fast; after getting over the shock of actually doing it, I decided my imagination hadn't done the ride justice. The blur outside became brighter and wind started rushing through the cabin as the window silently slid down. Reli had opened both of them fully. "You really don't like playing it safe, do you?"

Reli's hair whipped behind her in the wind, framing her golden face in chocolate brown silk. "When we get to a town, I'll close the windows. I promise." She smiled that wonderful teasing smile again, and I mentally kicked myself for finding her fanglike canines cute.

"What are you going to do once you get there?"

"I don't know. I thought we could drive by where I live.

At least, where I should be living." Her expression grew distant. "I suppose this is pretty silly, isn't it? But... I don't want to think about tonight."

"About going back?" I said with surprise.

"About not going back. We don't really know if that thing... opened a gateway, or if it'll be that simple to go through it again. We don't know how or why I got here."

"Crossing dimensions should violate a few physical laws," I said. I had been following her, honestly, but somewhere at the word "gateway" I took a tangential road. So I don't think linearly.

"What do you mean?"

"I don't know. But if you're from a different universe, you shouldn't be able to get here without an equivalent amount of matter or energy being transferred the other way."

"Well, I'm here. Maybe it doesn't work that way."

"It has to work that way."

"Maybe I'm not from a different universe in that sense. Or maybe conservation of energy is about the total in all the universes, not just one. Or maybe it just doesn't work the way you and I think." She laughed. "Physical laws are only immutable until the day somebody pops out, proves them wrong and makes the next generation develop the next set of immutable laws. Well, here I am."

"Then you know about conservation of energy?"

She snorted. "Yes. And quantum mechanics, relativity, tachyon engines."

I mentally reviewed that last sentence. "Did you say, 'tachyon engines?' "

"Just kidding." She grinned evilly.

I sighed and looked out the window again. "You said, 'how or why I got here,' didn't you?"

"Yes."

" 'Why' isn't a logical question in this case."

"I think everything has a reason, Spencer."

I raised my window and leaned my side against the door, my right knee nearly touching the gearshift. "Then why do you think you're here?"

"I don't know." She flicked the wheel to one side and back again, passing a couple in a Tercel who watched the Porsche rocket past as if it had flown off the last reel of *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. "Maybe I won't know until I get back. Maybe I'll find out before I leave." Her voice was cheerful, but she was biting her lower lip, a shadow visible behind her bright eyes again: what if she couldn't leave?

We drove on in silence, now heading down SR 70. When we reached the city limits to Arcadia she rolled her window up and dropped down to 65 for the 45 mph zone; it felt as if we were standing still.

"Do you mind if I put on some music?"

"What?" I looked over at Reli; she was holding a compact disc in one hand. I noticed, for the first time, her fingernails were pointed and thick, developing into near-claws at the end. "Are your claws retractable?"

She lowered the disc and gave me an amazingly confused look, her ears flattening slightly. "I'll take that as a no. Go right ahead. Please."

Reli looked at me a moment longer and shook her head, then put the disc into the stereo. The system's brand name was "Telan-QWI"; it was colored snow-white, with translucent yellow buttons. It only appeared to have one band, labeled "KMt," and had more controls than some mixing decks I've seen. Whoever Telan-QWI was, I suspected their human-world counterpart only advertised in obscure audiophile magazines and charged more for a set of speakers than most people made in a month.

The stereo's display came to life with an unsettlingly normal LCD display reading "12 Tr 63:47," followed shortly by "1 Tr 0:00." The track timer started running and the cabin suddenly boomed with a chord from a pipe organ. A violin started very softly under the organ, playing low notes against the unchanging hollowness of the pipes, then rose in an incredibly intricate, haunting melody. The notes of the organ started to fade away as the violin's last bars were repeated again an octave lower and at twice the tempo over a seat-shaking drum opening. Two measures later the guitar and synthesizer started, picking up the riff. The percussion slid into a drum line that would have made Neal Peart break into a cold sweat.

How could you be attracted to a cat, blockhead? **My mind chased its own tail, or perhaps chased Reli's, as the road flew by.**

"I don't know if you like this kind of music," Reli said, reaching to turn down the volume. The lead vocal began, female, a low, strong voice with Bowie's phrasing, starting to sing of castles and storms and the frailty of humans—or cats—with perfect clarity.

I reached out to brush her hand away. "Whoever they are, they're incredible. The drummer is amazing." My palm pushed across the back of her hand for an instant; the fur was Persian soft.

The cat stared at our two hands without moving hers, her mouth slightly open, and seemed to run her tongue across the inside of her lips. Then she dropped her hand to the gearshift and seemed to almost pull herself back to the car. "Yes, she is. They're called Obsidian Rose." She reached up again, a near mechanical motion, and turned the volume up.

I watched Reli's face, hardly daring to breathe. Was that a reaction to our touch? Had it even happened? If it had, and it was.... But how could she be attracted to a human? *How could you be attracted to a cat, blockhead? Maybe* both *of you are perverts*. My mind chased its own tail, or perhaps chased Reli's, for long minutes as the road flew by.

We were in West Palm Beach before the Obsidian Rose album finished. I'd never have dreamed of making it across the state in ninety-odd minutes, but then again, I'd never have averaged 110 miles per.

"So where are we going?" It was the first thing either of us had said since that electric touch; she seemed to have been as

much thrown into thought over it as I was.

"I live in Briarwood; it's off of U.S. 1. Or at least, it is in my West Palm." She looked over at me worriedly.

"It's here, too." It wasn't the most expensive subdivision in West Palm Beach, not by a long shot, but that still meant they charged almost as much for a bare lot as the places I was used to would charge for a house. "Do you live alone?"

"Yes." She sighed. "My parents retired to Sarasota when I went to college, so the place is only occupied three months every year. Although now I'm out of school, so I guess it has a permanent resident."

"And they gave you the old house."

"As long as I take care of it."

"Must be nice." We turned onto U.S. 1, now firmly surrounded by traffic. Few spared the car more then a second glance; Reli's confidence in her window tinting appeared well-placed.

"They bought me the car two summers ago." She sighed. "They'll give me anything money can buy."

I laughed. "Most people wouldn't say that was so bad, Reli."

"I don't want to be a rich bitch," she snarled in a tone that made me want to back out of the window. "That's what they call me at school. Not to my face, but I hear about it.

"I don't know anything useful." She was suddenly talking faster, angrily. "I couldn't have made breakfast this morning. If this thing gets a flat tire, I can't change it. My parents couldn't do it, either. They'd just pay somebody to. Who needs skills when you can buy people who'll have them for you?" She threw herself down in the driver's seat, brow furrowed; I could almost see two little trails of steam rising from her flattened ears.

"Your life can't be all that bad. I can only dream of doing the things you probably take for granted."

"That's my point. I *shouldn't* be." Her voice was almost a hiss. "Do humans have the term 'young upwardly mobile professional?' "

I laughed in spite of myself. "Yes, we do."

"The people I want to be friends with don't like me because I'm a yuppie, and the yuppies who want to be friends with me are shallow idiots. And the only difference between them and me is that they *like* being shallow idiots."

"Take it easy," I said, reaching out and stroking one shoulder. The sensation of her fur against my skin was enticing, inviting me to take her into my arms and bury my face in its plushness. "Being rich doesn't mean you have to be a shallow idiot."

"How many rich people do you know?"

"I don't know."

"A few? How many of them are interesting?"

"Uh—"

"I mean, really interesting. How many of them are fun to be with? How many would you go looking for when you wanted to do something? How many of them do you have fun with just being around? None."

I knew what I wanted to say, but a little voice inside my head warned me to keep my mouth shut. I took a deep breath and, for once, overrode my social risk avoidance system. "That's not true. I can think of one right now."

Reli looked confused, then startled. Then, for a few seconds, the most adorable shade of red shone through the fur on her muzzle.

It was only ten more minutes to Briarwood, and another five minutes of driving down gently curving streets lined with expensive, well-manicured homes that were all one of three basic shapes. There are a lot of things I like about Florida, but architectural originality isn't one of our strong points.

We stopped in front of an obnoxious mint-green home with a two-car garage, a BMW parked in the driveway, and a litttle kid playing on the lawn. "My God." Reli rolled down her window and stuck her head out, looking at the house. "This is the right address. 2530 Azalea Court. But the house is...."

"Different?"

"...Ugly. It's supposed to be shorter than that, with a little garage. Brick, not painted concrete. No stupid arch on the porch." She leaned out further, scrutinizing the humans' aesthetic values and shaking her head sadly.

"You probably shouldn't have the window rolled down like that," I said nervously. The little boy, no more than five, was gaping at Reli's visage with an expression of pure, unabashed puzzlement.

"And they're yuppies, too. Yuppies suck," Reli continued.

The little rug rat suddenly ran toward the car, having made a positive ID of the driver. "Kitty!" he called gleefully.

"Kitty?" Reli repeated, glancing down at the child and then at me. The child's mouth dropped open when she spoke. A talking kitty!

"It's another word for cat."

"Heathcliff?" the child inquired doubtfully. Reli glanced at me again.

"Not worth the explanation," I sighed. "We should move on before the kid's parents come out."

The boy walked closer to the car and reached up to Reli with both hands. "Kitty," he said again, apparently deciding Reli didn't fit Heathcliff's parameters closely enough. "Kiss kitty cat." He tried to jump into the car.

Reli reached down and picked up the child. He promptly kissed her on the nose and tried to pull her hair. She disentangled his hands and licked his cheek, and he made an amazing hiccup/giggle noise and stared at her as if she was the Lady of the Lake handing him Excalibur. Then she set him down and rolled up the window; the car pulled away from the curb silently. He was still visible in the rear window, staring at the car wide-eyed.

"I suppose you think that was kind of silly," she said, smiling.

"A little foolhardy, maybe." I figured the kid was going to go to his parents, tell them about the pretty cat lady who kissed him and start an awful fight between them about whether putting him in that accelerated-learning nursery school had done more harm than good. Then I tried, unsuccessfully, not to be jealous of the snotty little brat.

"So now what?" she said after we got back on U.S. 1.

"I don't know. We could get some lunch, I suppose. No, we couldn't, could we?" I sighed. "You make an awfully inconvenient date."

She laughed. "Perhaps we'll learn how to control the gate and find some world where both my type of cat and your type of human mix without raising eyebrows. Or we can be trend-

setters for today right here."

"You're going back tonight. I have to live here forever."

She was silent again; I mentally kicked myself once more. I shouldn't have brought up this evening; if we tried the disc and it didn't work, she was in deep trouble.

"This place has a drive-up window. What's their food like?" she said, slowing down as we approached a McDonald's.

"What, you don't have McD's?"

"We have fast food," she said defensively. "I've, uh," she coughed, "never eaten any."

"You're kidding."

"How's their damn food?"

"Quick, cheap, and nasty."

"Well, since you're going to have to pay for me, and pay for gas, cheap is good." She swung into the drive-through lane about twice as fast as she should have, bringing the car to a stop in front of the speaker so gracefully I didn't even feel a bump. I hate people who can do that.

"Welcome to McDonald's. Can I take your order, please?" the speaker said from my side as I rolled down the window. "Just a minute," I responded.

Reli looked at the menu board. "What's a hamburger?"

"Cooked beef patties on a bun. You don't have them?"

"Not by that name." She turned away from the board. "I don't know. Get me something with cheese."

"Yes, ma'am," I said, turning back towards the speaker. "I'd like two Quarter Pounders with cheese, one with extra pickles, two regular French fries and two large Cokes." Reli pulled forward on the speaker's command.

The man taking the money was busy with another order and barely looked at my hands when he was taking the money. We pulled forward to the second window. "That's two Quarters, two regular fries, two large Cokes," the girl there said unnecessarily, handing me both Cokes. She watched me hand Reli hers and her eyes grew wide. "Oh, wow," she said, bending down at the counter to get a closer look. "Are you in some kind of costume?"

"Realistic, isn't it?" Reli said, leaning forward and smiling, thankfully without showing any teeth.

"That's wild." She handed me the bag containing the fries and burgers. "How'd they make your nose move like that when you speak?"

"Duct tape," she replied cheerfully, pulling away from the booth.

Both the girl and another worker had their heads out the window staring at the car. Reli rolled down her window just enough to stick her arm out and waved at them, then closed both windows. She looked at me and grinned; I shook my head, trying to look stern but only making her laugh out loud.

"This isn't that bad," she said a few minutes later, nibbling on the Quarter Pounder. She took a sip of her Coke and regarded the cup for a few seconds as if it wasn't quite what she had expected, then downed the rest of the burger in under a minute.

We drove around West Palm a little more, Reli commenting on every sight that wasn't the same as the ones she was used to, then stopped and refilled her tank. I was beginning to be glad I had gotten paid yesterday.

The trip back to Sarasota was quiet; the cat drove at a more leisurely 85, and I reclined my seat back and dozed off. When I awoke, the car was stopped; Reli's seat was reclined back, too, and she was turned on her side, facing me.

I watched her with my eyes slitted for a few minutes. She was surveying me with what seemed to be intense interest, her mouth slightly open, tongue clasped between her teeth; then she rolled over and stretched, tracing her hands from her inner thighs across her breasts and over her shoulders. A sharp, spiky heat ran through my veins, and I shut my eyes tightly for a second. *Don't even think about it.*

When I opened them fully, Reli was sitting up again, fiddling with her travelling bag. "We're back," she said.

I clicked my seat forward. We were in the glade, my car parked to one side. The sun was setting. "How long have we been here?"

"About an hour," she said. "I didn't want to disturb you." She looked as if she wanted to add something else, but decided against it at the last moment. "It's almost time."

We got out of the Porsche; she produced a blanket from the car's back and spread it out on the grass, and we sat down, facing the sun. "I still don't know very much about you, anthropomorphic human," she said after a moment.

"There's not that much to know. I'm a fundamentally boring person." I laughed. "I'm a part-time assistant at a bookstore. I'm a liberal arts major.... What else? I don't have that many friends; the ones that I have are weird. I read too much science fiction but not as much as I'd like. I like driving but can't afford to do it that much on my salary. And that's about it."

"No girlfriend?"

"I don't seem to run into many people who share some attitudes I have."

She cocked her head, an amused/puzzled expression on her face. "What attitudes are those?"

"Oh, I don't know. That you're supposed to really know someone, care about them, and be close friends before you're... anything else."

"We don't have much room for romantics, either." She sighed. "I'm not supposed to be one, you know. It goes against all the values up-and-coming debutantes are supposed to have."

"Are you a debutante?"

"No." She laughed. "I guess I'm not, even when I try." The sun disappeared behind the line of trees; the moon was now quite visible above the east horizon. "Do you believe in love at first sight?"

"I never have—not literally," I said carefully. "I suppose if you find the right person—whatever that means—you could fall in love very quickly."

"Yes," she replied softly, looking off into the trees.

I stood up and crossed to the disc, then looked around. A few seconds of hunting produced an almost-round rock. I rolled it gently towards the disc. When the rock touched it, the disc glowed purple; as it rolled off, the disc became black again, and the rock became... transparent.

Reli stood up and crossed over to stand by me, then walked over to the rock. "Where'd it go?" she suddenly said.

"It's right there," I said. "You're standing by it."

"No, I'm not."

I walked slowly towards her. When I passed the disc, the rock disappeared from my vision. "A-ha," I said. "There's a... window around the disc." I crossed back over to it. "I can see the rock, looking over the line on the disc as if it was the window's bottom. But from where you are, I can't see it at all."

"That's..." Her gaze sharpened, and she moved towards me, staring at the "window." Then she gasped. "I can see the cabbage palm."

I crossed over to her side and looked in the direction she was pointing. The view was the same as it had been on the disc's other side looking towards the road, except that now the ghostly image of a squashed cabbage palm was superimposed over one of the whole ones.

"Then that's it. All you have to do to get back is to drive over the disc."

Reli looked at me, then stepped towards the cabbage palm, one foot coming down firmly on the disk. It flashed purple. As she walked towards the palm, she became as insubstantial as the rock had; she walked over to the ghostly squashed palm and pulled off a transparent frond, then walked back to me and placed her foot on the disc again. It glowed green as she stepped through, now solid. She handed me the frond silently, then walked back to the blanket and sat down, looking troubled.

"What's wrong?" I said, hurrying over beside her.

"I... don't know," she said. Then she looked at me, straight into my eyes, and I didn't stop myself from falling into her liquid green pools this time. "Will we ever see each other again?"

"Uh..." I had to break contact with her eyes to muster enough strength to answer. "If the gate stays open, you could come back through."

"I wouldn't know how to get to your apartment." She laughed softly, but a tear ran down her muzzle. I wiped it away with a finger, then hugged her awkwardly. "We can't know," she breathed.

When we drew apart, she looked up at the sky, studying the moon, then took off her shoes and looked down at the ground. Then she took a deep breath, throwing her head back and clenching her fists. "Spencer."

"Yes?"

"Something... you said." She shook her head and leaned forward on her arms, letting her hair cascade around her shoulders. From where I was sitting, the moon was a backdrop to her, light fringing her fur and shining around her, and she was achingly sensual. I gave up trying to talk myself out of being attracted to her, and even stopped trying to rationalize it. I just nodded, barely perceptibly.

"About Belladonna." Reli slid closer, her leg pressing against my own, and traced her hands along my arms, then down my back, almost bringing her body against me. She shifted up slightly and cupped one hand against my head, tilting it back to bring my lips a hair's breadth away from hers. "If *I* rub up against you and start to purr... will I get to have *my* way with you?"

My mind short-circuited all at once. Someone who wanted me, who I wanted, who I was falling love with—wasn't human. Then I stopped, marvelling more at my own thought than the person before me.

Love.... Philosophical and intellectual aloofness had helped me stay sane through most of my life. Things can't bother you if you don't get involved. Once you lose it, can you get it back? Part of me didn't want to give that so-precious separation up. That part yammered at me loudly, urging me to back away.

The rest of me stared at Reli open-mouthed for an eternity of seconds, then reached up to her shoulders, pushing my fingers into her thick neck fur, and gently pulled her down on top of me. *Oh, yes yes yes*, every hormone in me screamed jubilantly as her mouth pressed against mine.

It is impossible to describe how sensual that kiss was. It was long, extremely physical, licking and biting, rough feline tongue against smooth human... well, never mind. If I could get even half the ecstacy across to anyone, they'd either commit me on the spot or try to French a tiger, and I wouldn't want to be responsible for either happening.

We pressed closer, rolling prone together on the blanket, and she pulled my shirt up to my shoulders, running her hands across my back. "You feel wonderful," she whispered in my ear, then bit the earlobe, licking down across my cheek. I gasped; she let go of me and sat up, running a hand over my chest and unbuttoning the shirt completely. Then she pulled off her blouse. I was right; she hadn't been wearing a bra. Her nipples were erect, poking slightly through the fur. I gaped for a second, then reached up and stroked the downy fur between her breasts; she giggled and reared up on her knees, straddling me—then pounced.

The exact details of what came afterward I'll leave to your imagination. She does purr, quite loudly, and yes, she got to have her way with me right then, before we had even finished taking our clothes off. After we were both nude, she had her way with me again, this time in a slower, more sensual way. Her touch is fire, from the tickle of her tail against my leg to pads and claws clamping me to her with sharp jabs and insistent pushes. She loves to be rubbed, and there's this one spot at the base of her tail... uh, never mind again.

"If *I* rub up against you and start to purr... will I get to have *my* way with you?"

Soon we both lay side by side, catching our breaths. Then I rolled on top of her and bit her neck. She brought her legs up around me, and sat up, moving onto my lap, pushing me down and straddling me in a much more demanding fashion this time. She knows a lot of interesting ways, and spent the next few hours having me as many of them as we had the stamina for. Reli has a lot of stamina.

After we were exhausted, we lay in each other's arms, my head nestled against her breasts, one of her legs and her tail around my waist. We stayed that way, just the moonlight and her soft purr, for hours.

I was the first to move. The moon was getting low in the horizon. "If you're going to leave, you're going to have to do it now."

She smiled up at me, then rose gracefully to her feet and stretched. I resisted the urge to pull her down on the blanket again; if it turned into the same sort of lovemaking, the sun would be well into the sky by the time we were finished—much less recovered.

We dressed silently; she threw the blanket into the back of the Porsche, then turned and faced me. "I'll come back if I can. You know that."

"I do," I said, hugging her. The embrace turned into one last passionate kiss.

Both of us said "I love you" at the same time. Reli climbed into the Porsche and started the engine, rolling down the window. "I'll be visiting my parents again in a month."

"You didn't visit them this time."

Her face clouded, then she laughed almost hysterically. "I don't think they'd believe me if I told them why." She put the car into gear.

"Somehow I will see you again, Reli." I tried to sound more confident than I felt. God....

"I know. Goodbye, Spencer. Love."

"Goodbye, love."

The car rolled forward. The front left tire touched the disc, followed by the rear left; it flashed purple twice, and the car became insubstantial. I kept watching as the ghostly Porsche bumped its way toward a different SR 72. A few minutes after that, the first rays of sunlight appeared, and the superimposed view of the squashed cabbage palm winked out. I regarded the disc a moment, then carefully covered it with the remains of the stump that had hidden it for centuries.

The night after that I went back to the glade and uncovered the disc. The squashed cabbage palm didn't appear.

I walked purposefully over the disc, stomping on its surface as I went; it remained dark. I tried again a dozen times before giving up, sitting down on the patch of grass the blanket had been spread out on, and crying. I wondered if, in the same glade in a different reality, a beautiful furred woman was sitting alone crying, too.

I should have known it was a temporary gate. I had no reason to know it, of course, but—poetically—it made sense. Fantasies are temporary by nature. Even if it had been real, it had been a fantasy.

I had almost convinced myself none of it had been real by the time three weeks had passed. I remembered every word we had said to each other, every touch during those last few hours—every feeling I had for her. For who? A woman who could not have existed. If it had been just a vivid dream—no matter how beautiful it was then—its falsehood made it a nightmare.

Then, cleaning out my car, I found a five-dollar bill with a picture of a lion on it.

I wasn't able to convince myself to go back to the glade for another week; almost a full month had passed since Reli had flagged me down that night. The moon was again one day away from full. I approached the disc, shaking with a chill not from the summer air.

The squashed palm was still there, although it was growing back. I stared at its image for what seemed like hours, then stepped onto the disc and off it, heading toward the cabbage palm. And then it was solid.

I wondered if, in the same glade in a different reality, a beautiful furred woman was sitting alone crying, too.

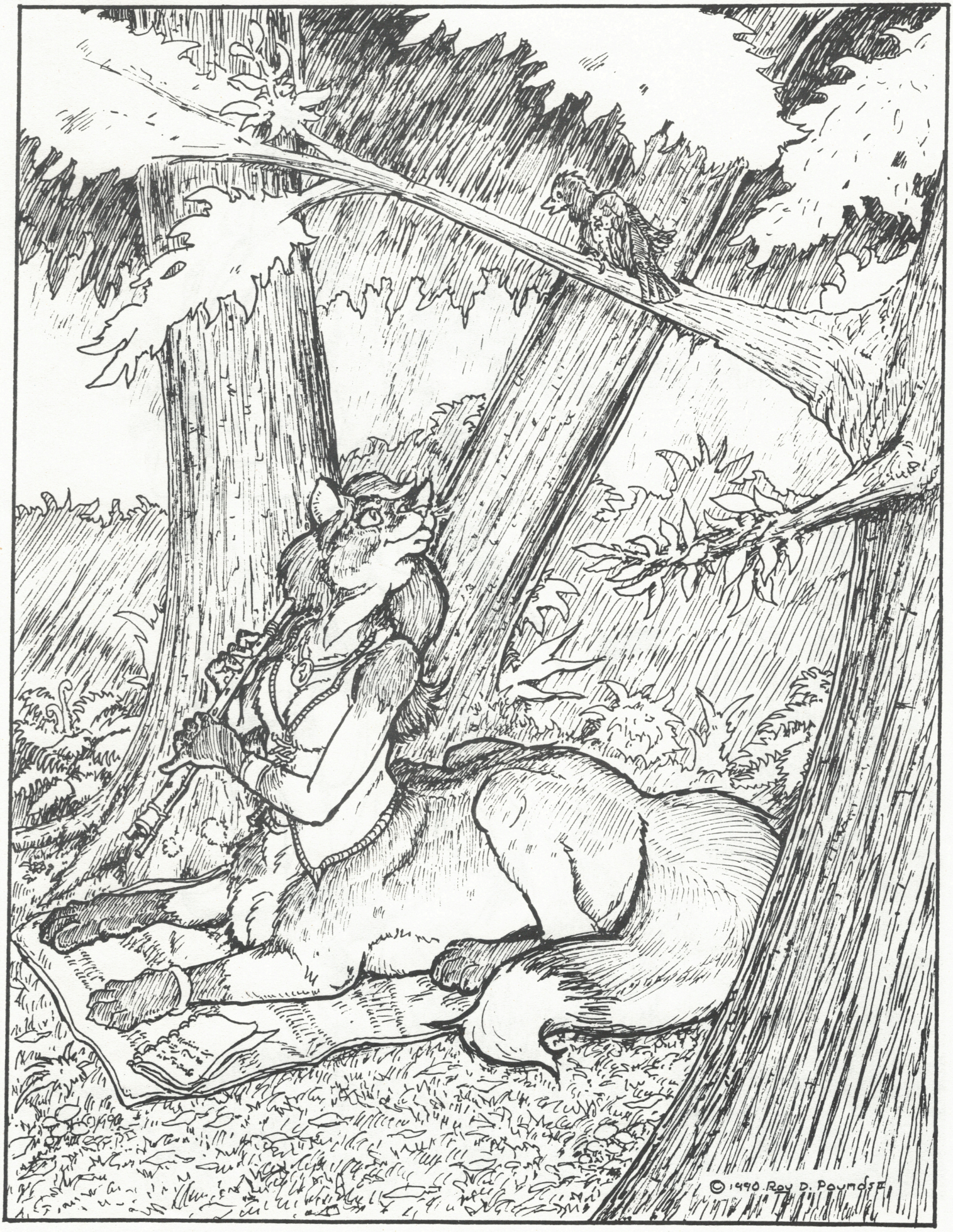
I passed by it and made my way to about twenty feet off the road, still hidden in the bushes. It took some fifteen minutes for a pickup to pass by. It was being driven by an old man in a Budweiser cap, a plaid shirt... and grey fur.

The gate seems to be on a lunar cycle. It remains open from the day before the full moon to the day after. After crossing back into this world, I headed home and got a good night's sleep, then woke up today, the day of the full moon.

My car can make it to West Palm Beach and back on a full tank of gas—one nice thing about underpowered Japanese imports. I blew a lot of money on window tint this morning and filled the tank this afternoon; when the sun sets, I'm heading back down to the other coast, to 2530 Azalea Court in Briarwood. Except not *our* Briarwood.

It should give me a day there. Next time she or I could spend two full days in the other's world. Of course, if I miss the window this time—or I'm wrong about its length—then I'd have to spend a month stuck inside at 2530 Azalea Court. But I can imagine worse things.

While I'm there, I need to make a copy of the Obsidian Rose album, too. For long road trips you should always have the right travelling music. ❑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How the Ibis Bent Its Beak

Paul Kidd

THEY WALKED ALONG THE RIVER BANKS. TALL REEDS RATTLED in the breeze as ibises walked serenely through the shallows. A bedraggled cormorant sat upon a rock, holding its wings up in the sun to dry. It looked utterly ridiculous.

Dhows slid slowly up the current, their white sails spread out to the breeze. The way was long and hot, the road was dusty. Sandhri and Raschid ambled along at a gentle pace, in no particular hurry. The road was well shaded with trees, and they were almost alone.

The wine was shared back and forth. Now this was life indeed! Strolling along in pleasant company—with food in your belly and wine on your tongue. Sandhri filled the air with incessant chatter, making Raschid smile in delight.

She pointed to the nearby ibises stalking through the water. "Every animal was given a gift by God. The tora gained his deadly beak, the horse v'ass given lightning speed. The hawk v'as given piercing eyes—the elephant great strengt'. All the lesser creatures climbed into the lap of God, and each received his blessing.

"And v'en the ibis took his turn, he v'ass filled with expectation:

" 'I am the cleverest of all the birds! For I have v'isdom! I haff deep and awesome t'oughts! V'at v'onderful t'ing v'ill God give me, the most gifted of all his children?'

"To the bird's enormous surprise, God patted him on the head.

" 'Ibis—oh Ibis. You are v'ise, but you are proud and selfish. So I give you a gift to make your v'isdom deeper. I grant you dignity. Your legs shall be long and straight, and your head shall be bald and austere. You shall have the demeanour of a scholar, the appearance of a priest.'

"And v'it' 'hat, God simply closed up shop!

"The ibis v'as outraged! All the ot'er animals had received a useful gift. But *dignity!* V'at use v'as dignity? V'at v'as 'dignity' in any case?

"'Dignity is having the respect of all around you. And the v'ay to gain respect is to be better than everybody else!' Said the ibis.

" 'I shall find out what is best in all around me, and I shall copy them exactly! I shall try to do evert'ing v'ell. Then everyone shall like me!'

"The other birds were overjoyed v'it' t'eir new gifts! The eagle sprang high up into the air to test his huge new wings. The ibis v'atched in seet'ing jealousy.

" 'Flight! Everybody admires someone who flies! I shall outrace this stupid eagle, t'en everyone v'ill admire me!"

"The ibis tried to follow the eagle, but sv'iftly fell behind.

" 'This is absurd! Am I to be bested by some dimv'it eagle?!'

"The ibis flapped awkwardly, t'rashing at the air as he tried to gain more speed. But all his efforts were to no avail! Finally poor ibis pulled a muscle in his v'ing! The eagle soared ever higher, and the ibis was forced to settle irritably by the river.

" 'Dignity! *Dignity!*' The ibis strutted about pettishly. 'V'at is dignity? V'y do I need such a useless t'ing?'

"The ibis saw the duck swimming on the water with her fine new paddle feet. The ibis sniffed.

" 'Very v'ell! If I cannot fly better t'an the eagle, I shall sv'im better t'an this silly dullard!'

"He launched himself out into the river with a graceful dive.

"*Splash!*

"The ibis flapped helplessly in the v'ater! He beat his v'ings and splashed, sv'allowing half the river!

"He squawked and squealed in panic! The ibis could not sv'im! 'Help! Help me! I'm drowning!'

"Suddenly a bill fastened on his neck. The duck wearily dragged the ibis from the v'ater.

"'Really ibis! V'y can't you enjoy your gift in peace? Leave me to my sv'imming!'

"The ibis irritably shook out his feat'ers.

" 'Ha! *Dignity*—V'at is t'is wretched *dignity!*'

"The duck waggled her pretty tail.

" 'Dignity is keeping true to your inner self. You are too jealous! Be proud of v'at you are, and try not to be what ot'ers v'ant you to be!'

"The ibis thought this to be a foolish concept. He tossed his head and left the duck v'it'out even saying 't'ank you.'

"He strolled along the banks v'it' his v'ings folded behind his back.

" 'Dignity! Dignity! I must find v'at people admire! If I can copy that, t'en I shall have dignity!'

"The peacock stalked by, trailing his glorious tail. All around him other animals stared in envy. Their beaks dropped open in breathless admiration. The ibis saw their expressions and gaped at the peacock in sudden envy!

" 'That's v'at I v'ant! To be beautiful! I shall be the most beautiful bird in all the v'orld! T'en I shall haff dignity in plenty!'

"But where could he find beauty? He must steal it from another! Surely God v'ouldn't notice if he stole a gift from somev'un small and v'eak?

"The ibis eagerly poked about in the rushes. Suddenly he saw a shimmering golden carp sv'imming serenely t'rough the v'ater. The ibis' greed flared high.

" 'Gold! I could haff golden feathers! T'en everyone would stop and admire me!'

"He pounced upon the golden carp and fastened his beak upon the fish's golden scales! The gift of 'beauty' was not yet stuck fast, and he felt it slip slightly from the fish's back! The ibis tugged all the harder!

"The carp v'ailed in dismay. 'Stop! Stop! You are stealing my beautiful scales!'

"But the ibis was relentless. He furiously tried to tug the carp's golden colour free! The carp desperately wrapped his tail about a reed and tugged in the opposite direction. His whiskers quivered in fright!

"The ibis' beak began to stretch. He tugged and pulled, he pulled and tugged, but still the carp held on!

"Something began to happen. The harder the greedy ibis pulled, the longer his beak began to stretch....

"The carp began to pull away, heroically battling t'rough the v'ater. The ibis' beak was bent around the reed stalk. Suddenly the carp broke free! He sv'am off into the v'ater and hid down at the bottom of the river, shivering in anger!

"The ibis tumbled backwards with a squawk! He fell on his feat'ery rump and squatted miserably in the shallows. His beak v'ass now long and t'in, and curved down in a long smooth arc. The ibis kicked the mud in irritation.

" 'Now t'is is a fine state of affairs! Just look at my lovely beak!'

"T'ere v'as no v'ay of changing back his beak! It v'ass firmly stuck in shape!

"Just then, the tora came prancing by. The huge bird had lost his wings, but had gained a beak for tearing prey. He v'as almost as big as a horse, and feeling very full of himself. He saw the ibis and screeched to a halt, staring down in shock!

" 'V'y ibis! V'atever has happened to your nose?'

"The ibis looked haughtily down his beak. Heaven forbid that he should appear foolish in anot'er's eyes. Ibis casually brushed at his clean v'ite feathers.

" 'Oh! You mean my beak? T'is is a new style that I have chosen. I t'ink it rather suits me. It has a certain dashing flair, don't you agree?'

"Dignity! *Dignity!*" The ibis strutted about pettishly. "V'at is dignity? V'y do I need such a useless t'ing?"

"He said it v'it' such serene conviction that the tora said no more. He scuttled off v'it'out offering the ibis any insult. One by one the ot'er animals came past to stare. But to each and every creature the ibis gave the same smoot' lie. He preened his feathers and kept his pride by showing how useful his great long beak had now become."

Sandhri pointed to the black-headed ibises striding about in the river's shallows.

"And so the ibis found his dignity after all. But to t'is day, the carp v'ill neffer speak to him!"

Raschid clapped his hands. The little Bat leapt up upon a fallen log and bowed her deepest bow, sweeping her ankles with her glorious hair. Her pert little tail stuck up into the air behind her.

Raschid was delighted. "An excellent tale! There's not a few I know that need to hear it!"

Sandhri almost burst with pride! She preened herself outrageously. There was no one's praise she would rather have. "Oh—v'ass just a little story! Not'ing special!" ❑

"How the Ibis Bent Its Beak" is excerpted from Fangs of K'aath, *currently being serialized in Rowrbrazzle.*


חאר
BLUMRICH

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Published bi-monthly. Most recent issue: #22, 50 pp. Subscription: $10 (6 issues). Back issues: #12-#22, $2 postpaid. Checks/MO: Ed Pegg, Jr.

THE EVER-CHANGING PALACE

c/o LX, Ltd.
11846 Balboa Blvd., #123
Grenada Hills, CA 91344

Editors: Vicky Wyman, Lex Nakashima. Publisher: LX, Ltd. A Xanadu fanzine containing art and stories related to Vicky Wyman's Xanadu comic. Recent contributors include Juan Alfonso, Will Faust, Steve Gallacci, Tracy Horton, Chuck Melville, Margaret Schnepf, and, at the risk of sounding redundant, Vicky Wyman.

Published occasionally. Most recent issue: #2, 76 pp. Single-copy prices: $5 for #1, $7 for #2. Checks/MO: LX, Ltd.

FURTHERANCE

200 Dupont Street
Philadelphia, PA 19127-1208

Editor/Publisher: Rune. Newszine about funny animal comics, fiction, and animation; reviews, interviews, articles, some art and fiction. Contributors include Scott Alston, Kevin Carroll, Jim Groat, Shon Howell, Kay Shapero, Noel Tominack.

Publishing schedule unknown. Most recent issue: #2, 48 pp. Subscription: "account" method (cost of each issue subtracted from your balance); issue #2's cover price was $3. Checks/MO: Ray Rooney.

FURVERSION

621 Boulevard Way
Oakland, CA 94610-1642

Editor: Karl Maurer/Faux Paw Productions. Publisher: Serendipity Enterprises. Furry comics, art, fiction; from "G" rated material to erotica. Contributors include Juan Alfonso, Scott Alston, Mitchell Biero, Eric Elliott, Michael Higgs, Scudder Kidwell, Bryce Nakagawa, Brian O'Connell, Chuck Melville, Ken Sample, Ted Sheppard.

Published Quarterly. Most recent issue: #20, 68 pp. Subscriptions $20 (4 issues); single copy price $6 postpaid. Back issues: from #18 to current, $6 postpaid. Checks/MO: Karl Maurer or FurVersion.

THE ROWRBRAZZLE SHOWCASE

c/o MU Press
5014-D Roosevelt Way NE
Seattle, WA 98105

Editors: Mark Ashworth, Fred Patten. Publisher: Edd Vick. Reprints of art and stories from the Rowrbrazzle APA. Contributors include Susan Van Camp, Darin Davis, Dan Flahive, Cathy Hill, Garrett Ho, Mike Kazaleh, Roy D. Pounds, Marc Schirmeister, Terrie Smith, Pete "Speet!" Stoller, Tom Verré, Diana "Vixen" Vick, Mark Wallace.

Published thrice yearly. Most recent issue: #1, 60 pp. No subscription information available. Single copy price $5 postpaid. Check/MO: Fred Patten.

YARF! • The Journal of Applied Anthropomorphics

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

Editor/Publisher: Jeff Ferris. Furry comics, art, fiction, reviews; no erotica ("suggestive" material allowed). Contributors include Maggie de Alarcon, Dave Bryant, Bill Fitts, Dan Flahive, Chris Grant, Kris Kreutzman, Watts Martin, Fred Patten, Zjonni Perchalski, Lance Rund, Ken Sample, Tom Verré, Dave White.

Published 8 times a year (every six weeks). Most recent issue: #7, 48 pp. Subscriptions: $24 (8 issues); single copy price $3 postpaid. Price increase for 1991: $4 single-copy, $32 subscription. Back issues: #1-#5, $3 postpaid; #6, $4 postpaid. Checks/MO: YARF!

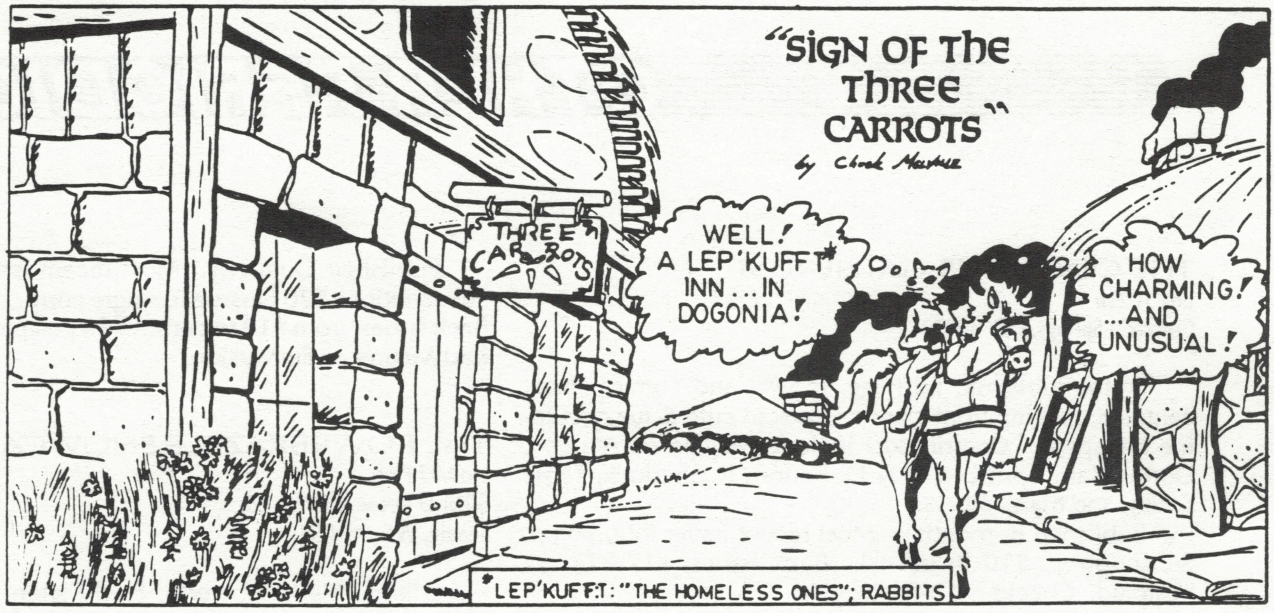
THE COMPUTER JOURNAL

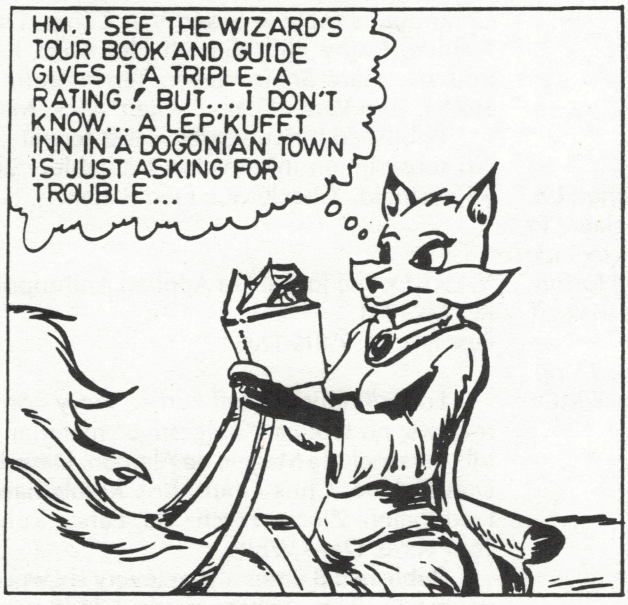
190 Sullivan Crossroad
Columbia Falls, MT 59912

Editor/Publisher: Art Carlson. Advanced computer topics including systems under MS-DOS, CP/M, CP/M-86, CP/M-68K, Z-System, OS-9 and other topics for 8086, Z80, 68000 and 32000 CPU families. Contributors include Bill Kibler, Bridger Mitchell, Clem Pepper, Jay Sage.

Published bi-monthly. Most recent issue: #44, 40 pp. Subscriptions: $18 (1-year), $32 (2-year). Checks/MO: The Computer Journal.

"Huzzah," "FurNography" and "Q"
have all apparently ceased publication.











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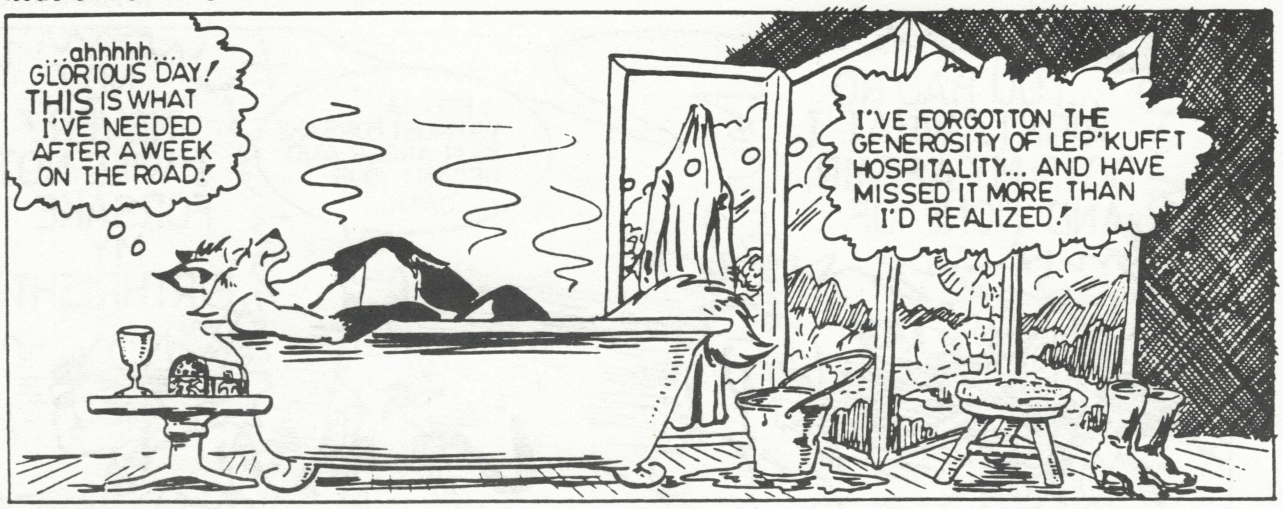

...ahhhhh... GLORIOUS DAY! THIS IS WHAT I'VE NEEDED AFTER A WEEK ON THE ROAD!
I'VE FORGOTTON THE GENEROSITY OF LEP'KUFFT HOSPITALITY... AND HAVE MISSED IT MORE THAN I'D REALIZED!

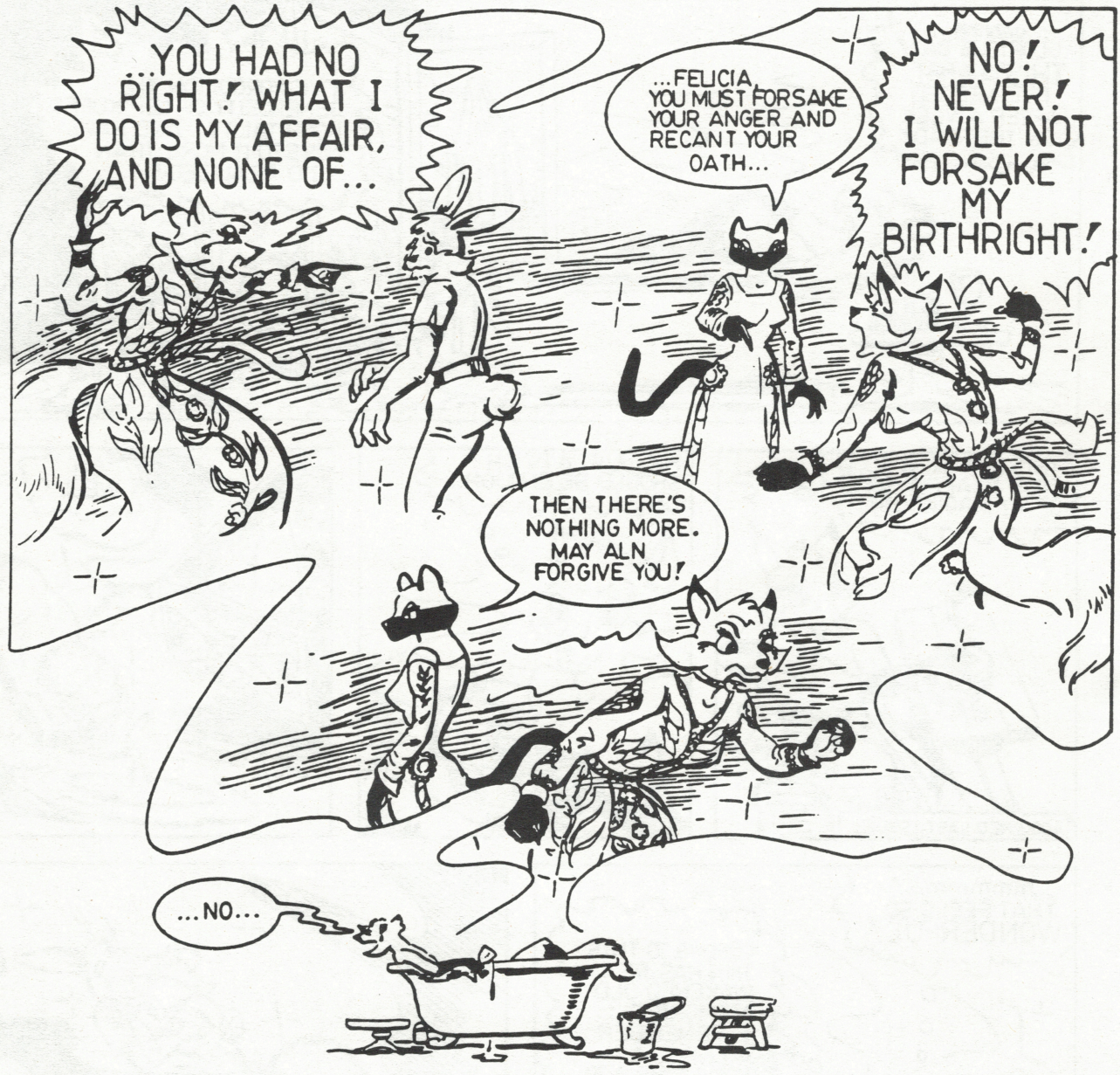

THIS MAY BE A GOOD TIME TO APPLY SOME OF MY MAGIKDUST.
ACQUIRED LAST ISSUE.


HM. JUST A PINCH SHOULD BE ENOUGH...


OH WELL!


...mmmmm...' THAT FEELS SO WONDERFUL!
COMING TO THIS INN HAS REAWAKENED OLD MEMORIES... I REMEMBER A LEP... A LONG TIME AGO...


...IT WAS SUCH A GOOD TIME... I WONDER... WHATEVER HAPPENED...?
2

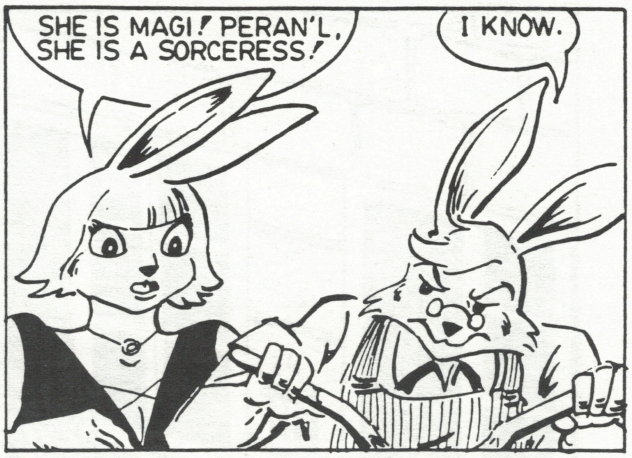

...YOU HAD NO RIGHT! WHAT I DO IS MY AFFAIR, AND NONE OF...
...FELICIA, YOU MUST FORSAKE YOUR ANGER AND RECANT YOUR OATH...
NO! NEVER! I WILL NOT FORSAKE MY BIRTHRIGHT!
THEN THERE'S NOTHING MORE. MAY ALN FORGIVE YOU!
...NO...

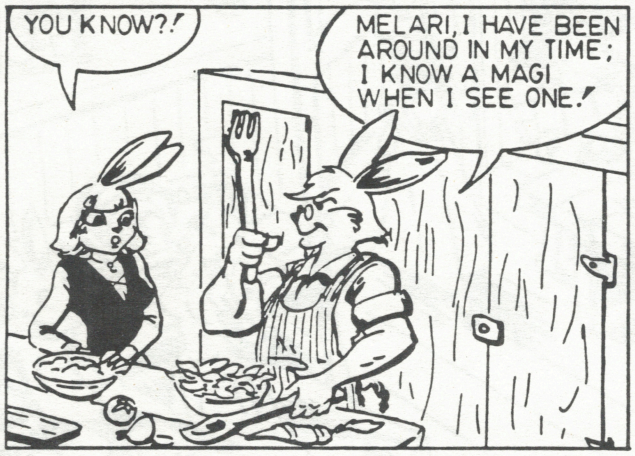

uh!


LA! THIS WINE HAS MADE ME MELANCHOLY!


I THINK I NEED SOME CHEERING UP. I'LL GO DOWN TO THE MAIN HALL AND LISTEN TO THE MUSICIAN... DRINK WINE... MAYBE DO SOME DANCING... AND...WELL... WHO KNOWS WHAT ELSE?
3


...I JUST FINISHED LAYING OUT MILADY FOX'S EVENING DRESS, AND WHAT DO YOU SUPPOSE I FOUND? A BOOK OF MAGIC SPELLS!
MM-HMM.


SHE IS MAGI! PERAN'L, SHE IS A SORCERESS!
I KNOW.


YOU KNOW?!
MELARI, I HAVE BEEN AROUND IN MY TIME; I KNOW A MAGI WHEN I SEE ONE!

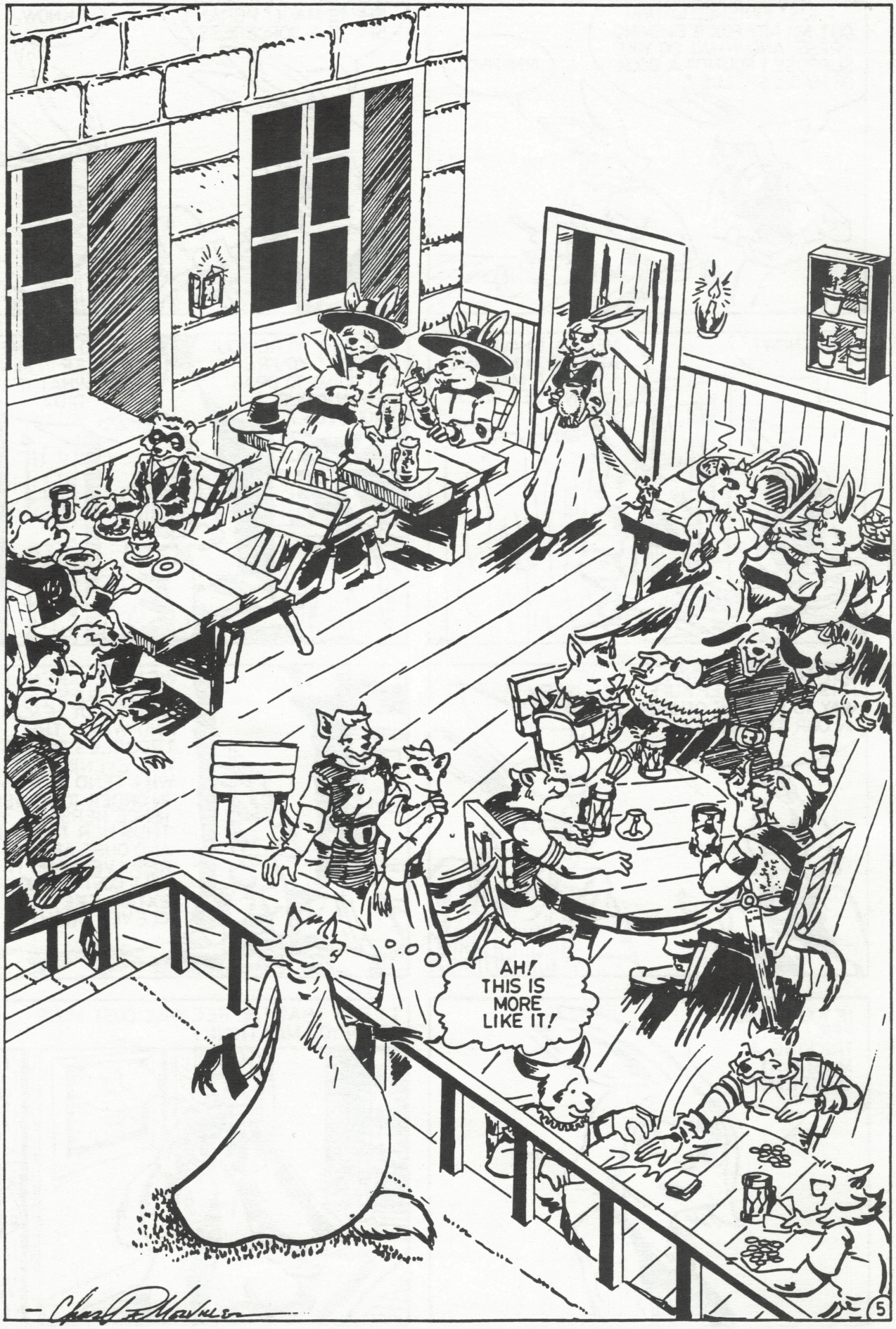

BUT, WHY WERE YOU... OH, PER! YOU'RE NOT GOING TO DRAG HER INTO OUR TROUBLES!
I HAD ANOTHER MATTER IN MIND... BUT WHAT IF I DID?

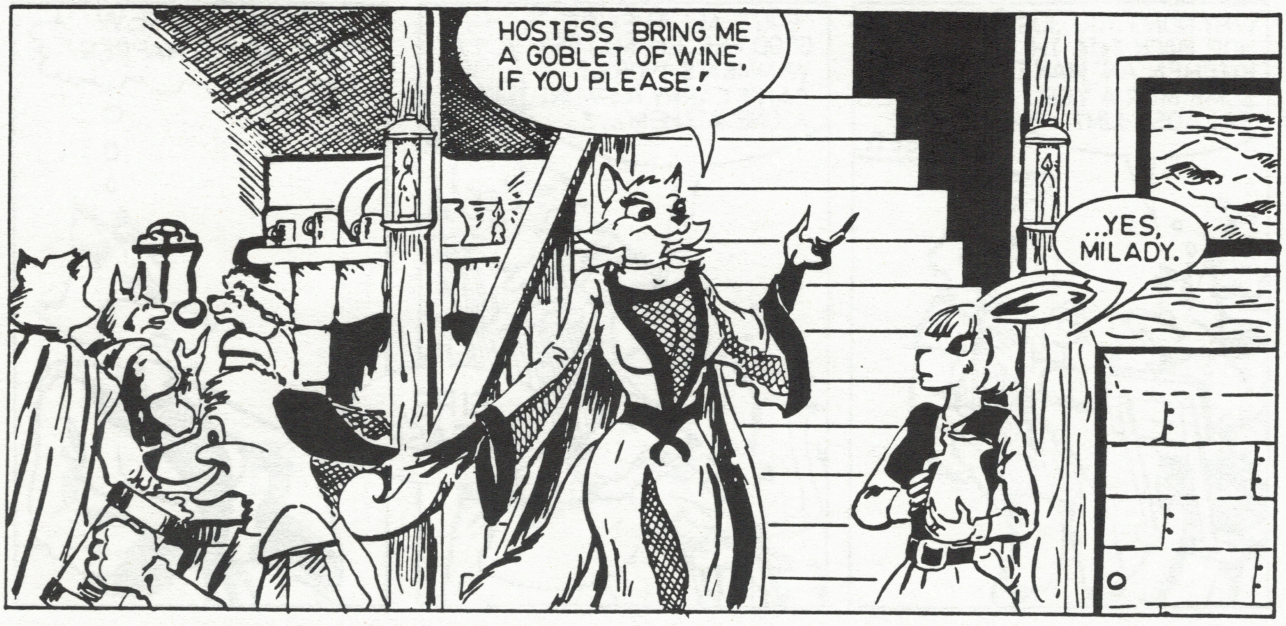

BUT THIS IS WRONG! IT IS NOT THE LEP'KUFFT WAY TO INVOLVE OTHERS IN OUR TROUBLES!
LISTEN TO ME!


WE HAVE TAKEN HER IN AS A GUEST; SHE WILL ENJOY HERSELF; AND WHEN THE TROUBLES BEGINS THIS EVENING, SHE WILL TEND TO THEM IN ORDER TO CONVENIENCE HERSELF. THUS HER TROUBLES AND OURS ARE RESOLVED, AND IT WILL COST US NO EXTRA FEE. CLEVER, RIGHT?


IF YOU SAY SO, PER... BUT... TRICKING A MAGI!... I DON'T KNOW...


"I FEAR THAT THE FEE WILL COST MORE THAN YOU MAY THINK!"
4


AH! THIS IS MORE LIKE IT!
5


HOSTESS BRING ME A GOBLET OF WINE, IF YOU PLEASE!
...YES, MILADY.


...AND DEN I TOL' HER, "ONLY ON YER BACK, BABY!" HAW HAW!
CURS!


AH, MINSTREL! PERHAPS YOU WOULD PLAY A MERRY TUNE FOR US?
A PLEASURE, MILADY! PERHAPS A BALLAD OF JOLLY BEN JOLLY?


...JOLLY BEN JOLLY, HE TRICKED THE DEMON AND THEN HE STOLE THE DIAMONDS FROM ITS CAVE...
BOO! HEY! WE DON'T WANNA HEAR 'BOUT NO DUMB RAKUNE!
YEAH! SING US A REAL DOG'S SONG!


...GENTLEMEN...!
WHAT? WHO WALKED IN?
...PLEASE... OTHERS ARE TRYING TO QUIETLY ENJOY THEIR MEALS...
HEY! HE SAID "please"!
WASSA MATTER, LONGEARS? WE NOT GOOD COM'ANY FER YA T'NITE?
6


WHY DON'T YOU JUST HOP BACK INTA TH' KITCHEN AN' MAKE SOME MOR'A YER SALADS, HUH?
UF! LOOK, THERE'S NO NEED..
'BOUT ALL THEY'RE GOOD FER, EH, MATES? WIMMEN'S WORK! CAN'T CARRY A SWORD, A'ONE A'THEM...!
SIRS, PLEASE!
OH, GUR! I KNEW THIS WOULD HAPPEN!
PLEASE! LET US MAINTAIN HARMONY...
NAH, IT'S NOT THAT THEY CAN'T CARRY A SWORD, BOWSER; THEY JUST WON'T!
YEH... DEY'RE PASI... PASSY...
...UH, DEY DONT FIGHT!
'COURSE, WE COULD BE WRONG...
LET'S SEE!
OOF!
SNAP!
NO, WE WUZ RIGHT!
THE RABBIT'S A CHICKEN!
HAW! HAW!
HAW! HAW!
HAVE SOME ALE INNKEEPER!
STUPID RABBITS! OPENING AN INN IN OUR VILLAGE...!
sigh
GENTLE SIRS, COULD WE NOT FOREGO THIS UNPLEASANT-NESS?
LOOK, LADY, GO SIDDOWN! NUTHIN'S GONNA STOP US FROM TEACHIN' THIS RABBIT A LESSON!
OH? EVEN IF I SAY...
7


TACKA
...PLEASE?
BOOM


AFTER ALL...
...I'M TRYING TO LISTEN TO THE MUSIC!


C'MON, ROVER; WE'LL GET YOU HOME...
...OOOOOKAAAYYY... ...YOU KNOW SUM'N, BOWSER...?
...I DON' FEEL SO GOOD...


YOU SEE, MELARI? I TOLD YOU THAT IT WOULD WORK!
AND IT COST US NOTHING!
REALLY.


I TRUST YOU'LL STILL FEEL THAT WAY WHEN THE CARPENTER AND THE MORTARER ARRIVE TOMORROW!
end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