

No. 1

\$2.00

(\$2.75 in
Canada)

Critters



FANTAGRAPHICS BOOKS

SAGALLACCI
STAN SAKAI
JOSHUA QUAGLIARELLI
©86

Critters

No. 1 June, 1986

THE GOLDEN THREAD

First Issue Editorial by KIM THOMPSON

For me, it's "Lost in the Andes."

I don't remember a lot about being a little kid. Most of my memories of that time, I believe, are false memories—a few wisps of true recollection, endlessly amplified by photographs, reminiscences, old letters. Do you really remember that first trip to the Grand Canyon when you were four, or is it that dusty photograph on the mantle that not just recreates, but indeed creates the memory?

Those early experiences, those perceptions, those feelings are locked behind the door of decades past, and even if you've managed to smuggle out a snapshot, or if you feel a tremor through the wood, it connects only fleetingly. They tell you this was you, and you believe them. But you don't know it. Your past is not yours to touch again.

Yet there is a key. The works of art you treasured as a child—the great works, at least—can summon up your past. Like a golden thread strung through the decades, these works of the imagination—whether on paper, or celluloid, or vinyl, or videotape—reconnect you with your past selves. And re-reading, re-viewing, re-experiencing, you become your former selves, all experiencing the marvels at once.

Give yourself over to that special comic book, and you are: the four-year-old whose mother bought him a comic, and who, though he can barely spell his way through the captions, follows, mesmerized,

the seductive dance of the images. You are: the seven-year-old who found the beat-up old comic at the bottom of a closet, who plunges into its delights once more. You are: the 13-year-old comic-book collector, who stumbled across the story as a reprint and can't understand his breathless exhilaration as he travels once more the trail. You are: the 19-year-old college student, who borrows a comic from his friend...

Within those pages, the laws of time are suspended, and there is some of you. Forever. And for me (among other things) it's Carl Barks's "Lost in the Andes."

That, basically, is why I'm publishing **Critters**. Is it a good reason to publish a funny-animal comic? I hope so.

Funny-animals have taken a terrific beating in the last few years. When Western Publishing heaved its final sigh and expired in a shower of bagged reprints, it sounded the death knell for the most enduring of the funny-animal series, the Disney titles.

Now, if you consider that for the first time in over four decades these precious cultural artifacts are not available to the general public—namely, kids—you begin to appreciate the enormity of the injustice the comic-book market has visited upon funny-animal comics.

The reasons for this reversal of fortunes are complex. They involve the radical restructuring of the comic-book industry; the coincident shift in the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 32

CONTENTS



Page 1

USAGI YOJIMBO in:
"Bounty Hunter"
by STAN SAKAI

Usagi Yojimbo ends up as the body-guard of a rhinoceros with a most dangerous profession...



Page 12

CUTEY BUNNY in:
"The Day After Forever"
by JOSHUA QUAGMIRE
with DAVE GARCIA

If Domino's friends don't show up, she'll just reread her favorite Cutey Bunny story...again and again.

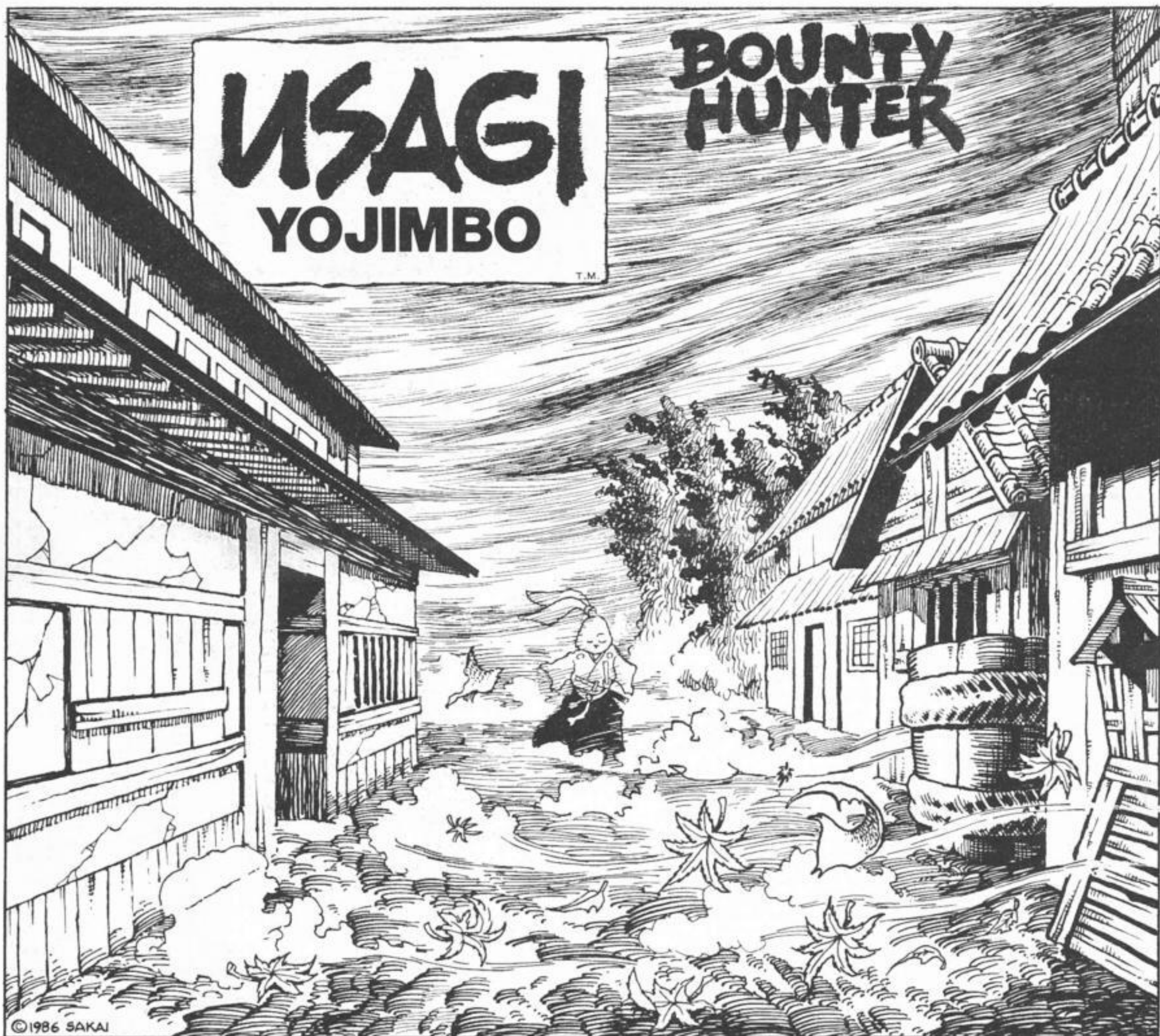


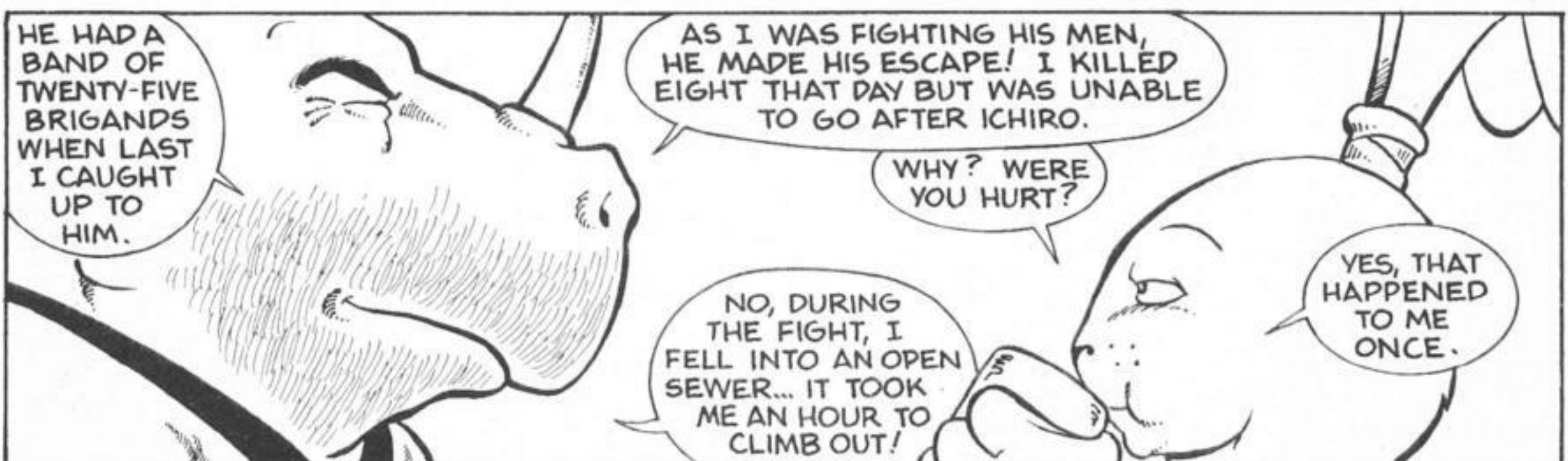
Page 23

BIRTHRIGHT
"Chapter One"

by STEVEN A. GALLACCI

The ancient rule of Shartoa, undermined by many years of abuse and neglect, crumbles at last...





ICHIRO'S BROTHER, KENICHI, HAS SINCE JOINED HIM! I HAVE HEARD HE IS AS DEADLY AS HIS BROTHER! I DON'T WANT THEM TO ESCAPE THIS TIME!

JOIN ME AND THE REWARD FOR THEIR MEN IS YOURS...

... BUT I GET THE BROTHERS!



I'M NO BOUNTY HUNTER.

THEN 'MUNCH' LET ME 'MUNCH' HIRE YOU AS A 'MUNCH' YOJIMBO.



A BODY-GUARD FOR A BOUNTY HUNTER?



HA! WHO WOULD NEED ONE MORE?



HA! HA! HA! HA!

INNKEEPER! TWO BOTTLES OF SAKE!

ON CREDIT, OF COURSE!



THE NEXT DAY...

A TEMPLE?

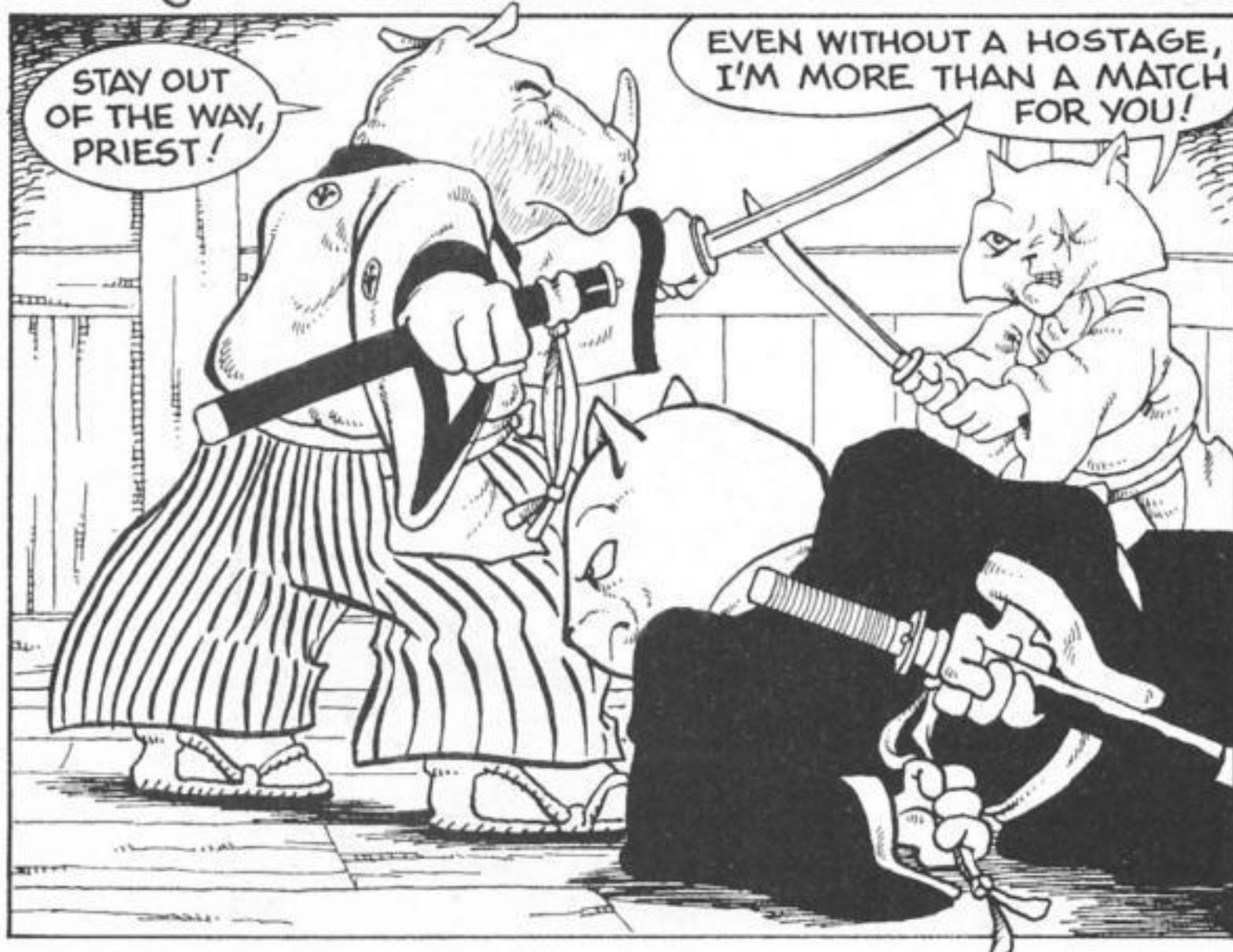
WHAT BETTER PLACE? THEY'RE HOLDING THE PRIEST HOSTAGE TO KEEP THE TOWNSPEOPLE IN LINE!

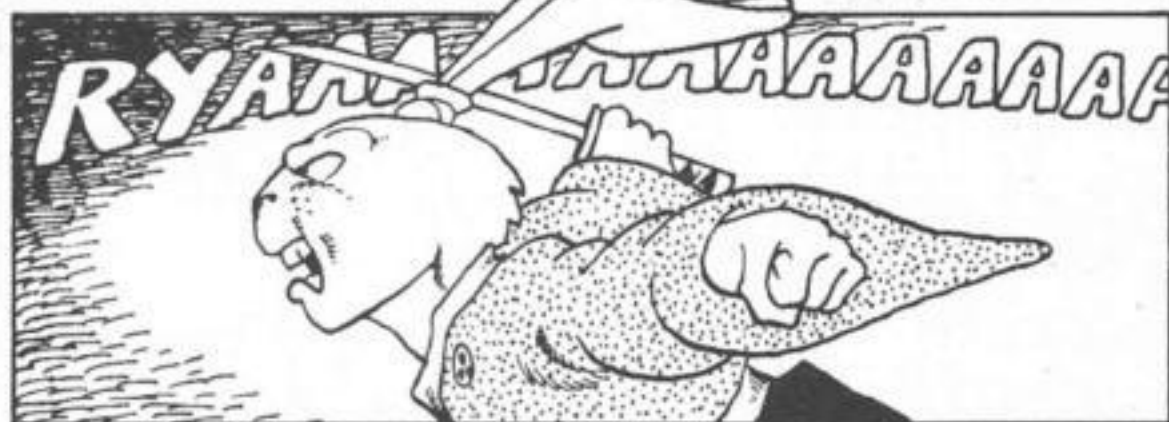
WHAT DO YOU TWO WANT HERE?



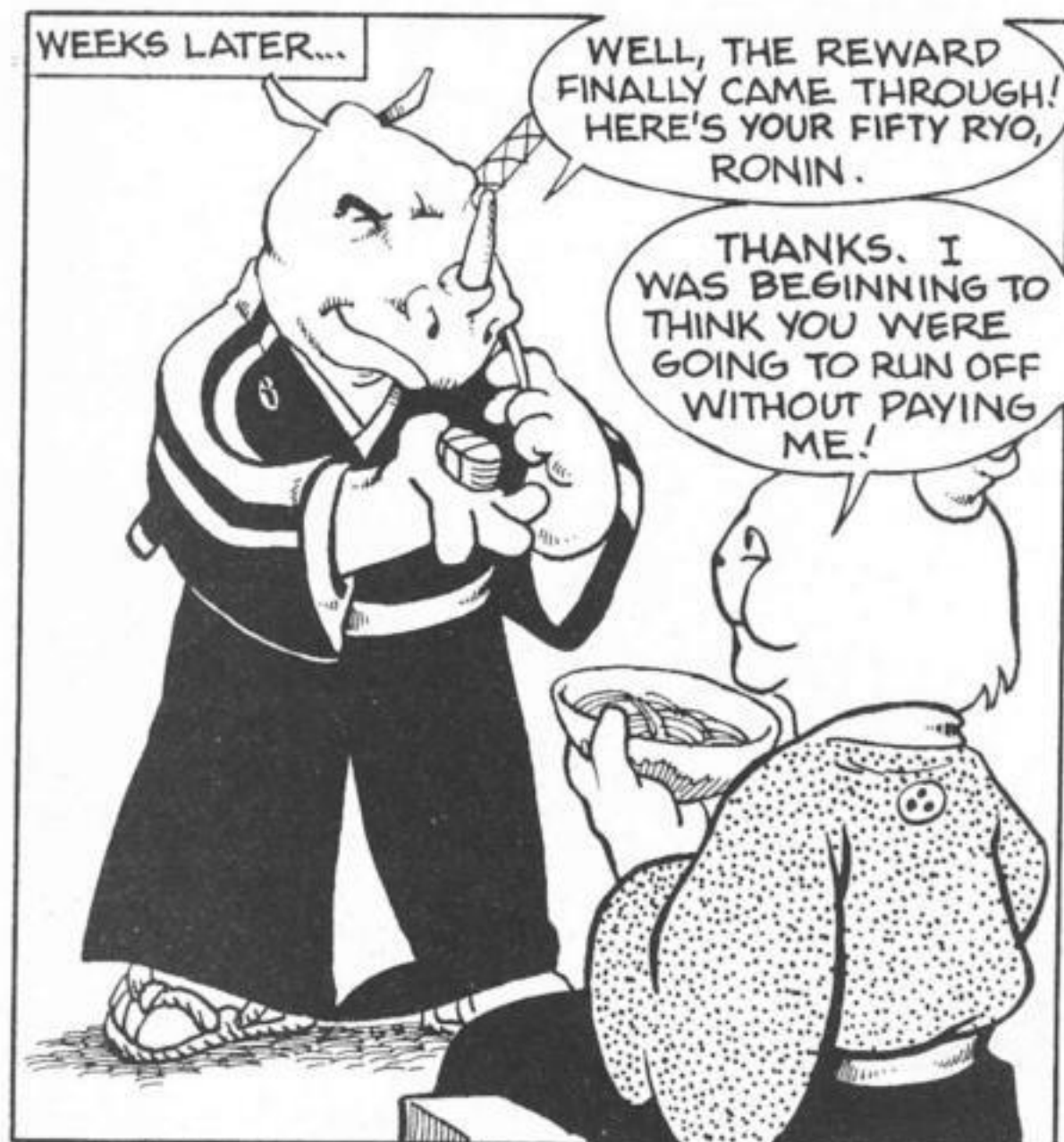












BOB

MERCENARY



Bob Mercenary is short. He has a big sword. He works very hard. Can you say “bionically reconstructed?” Can you say “Fectoids?” Do you know why the Fectoids would like to find Bob Mercenary? Would you like the Holo Brothers to come to your birthday party? If you had a unicycle and a lug wrench, would you be a bounty hunter? How many mutants live in the toxic swamps of New Jersey?

You may turn in your answers after you’ve read the first issue of *Threat*, due in February. There will be a penalty for tardiness.

FANTAGRAPHICS BOOKS

NOTE:
THIS IS NOT THE STORY I HAD
ORIGINALLY INTENDED TO PRESENT
HERE AND DUE TO A DIFFERENCE
OF "OPINION" THIS IS ALSO THE
LAST AND ONLY STORY I'LL BE
DOING FOR THIS PUBLICATION
UNLESS SOMETHING ENTIRELY
UNFORESEEN TRANSPIRES...
THE "KELLY IN EGYPT" STORIES
AND "RETURN TO EGYPT" TURNING
WILL EVENTUALLY BE TURNING
UP IN "CUTEY BUNNY-ARMY"
SURPLUS KOMIKS... SORRY FOR
ANY INCONVENIENCE TO YOU READERS
BUT THINGS HAVE NOT TURNED OUT
AT ALL AS I HAD ANTICIPATED...
COINCIDENTALLY, THIS FIRST
"DOMINO" STORY IS ALSO THE LAST.
THOUGH THERE WILL PROBABLY BE
OTHERS... THIS IS A BIT OF A GHOST
STORY YOU SEE... AND SO THE LAST
SHALL BE FIRST, FOR WITHOUT AN
ENDING THERE CAN BE NO BEGINNING
YET WITHIN THE MISTS OF ETERNITY THERE
IS NO PRELUDE OR FINALE... ONLY THE
PRESENT PREVAILS... OR, WHEELS WITHIN
WHEELS TO COIN A PHRASE... INFINITY
IS THE ITCH THAT CAN'T BE SCRATCHED... JO...

FOR MOST
OF US

TOMORROW IS
THE ANTICIPATION

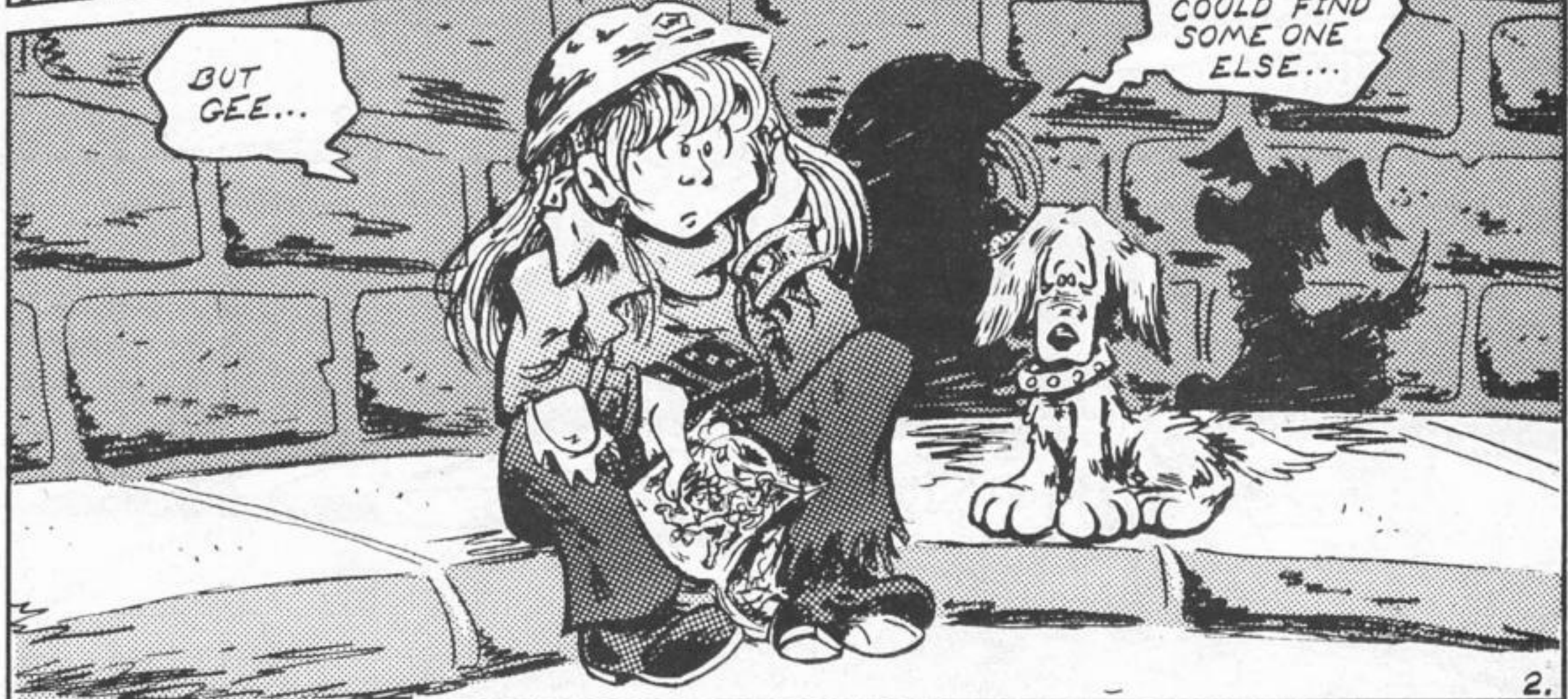
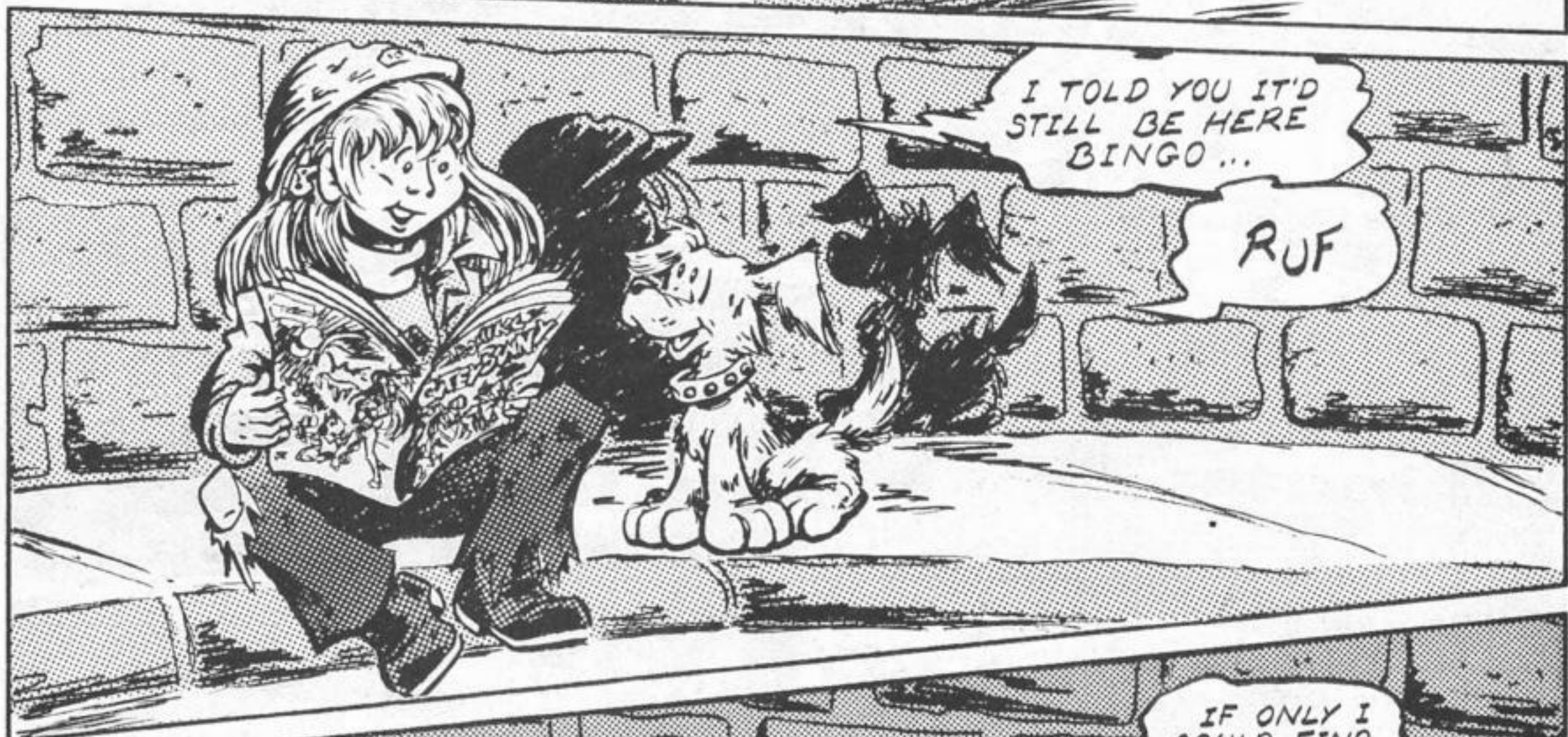
OF ANOTHER
MOMENT

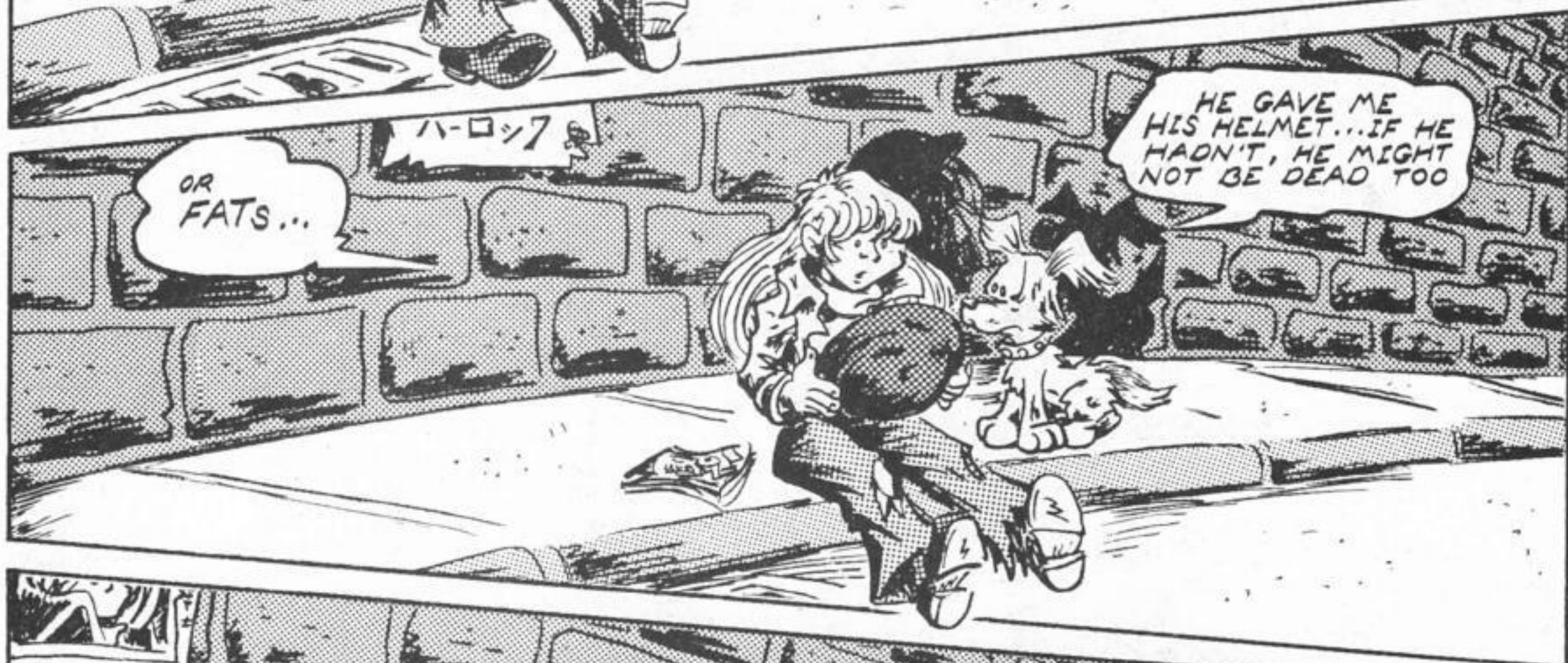
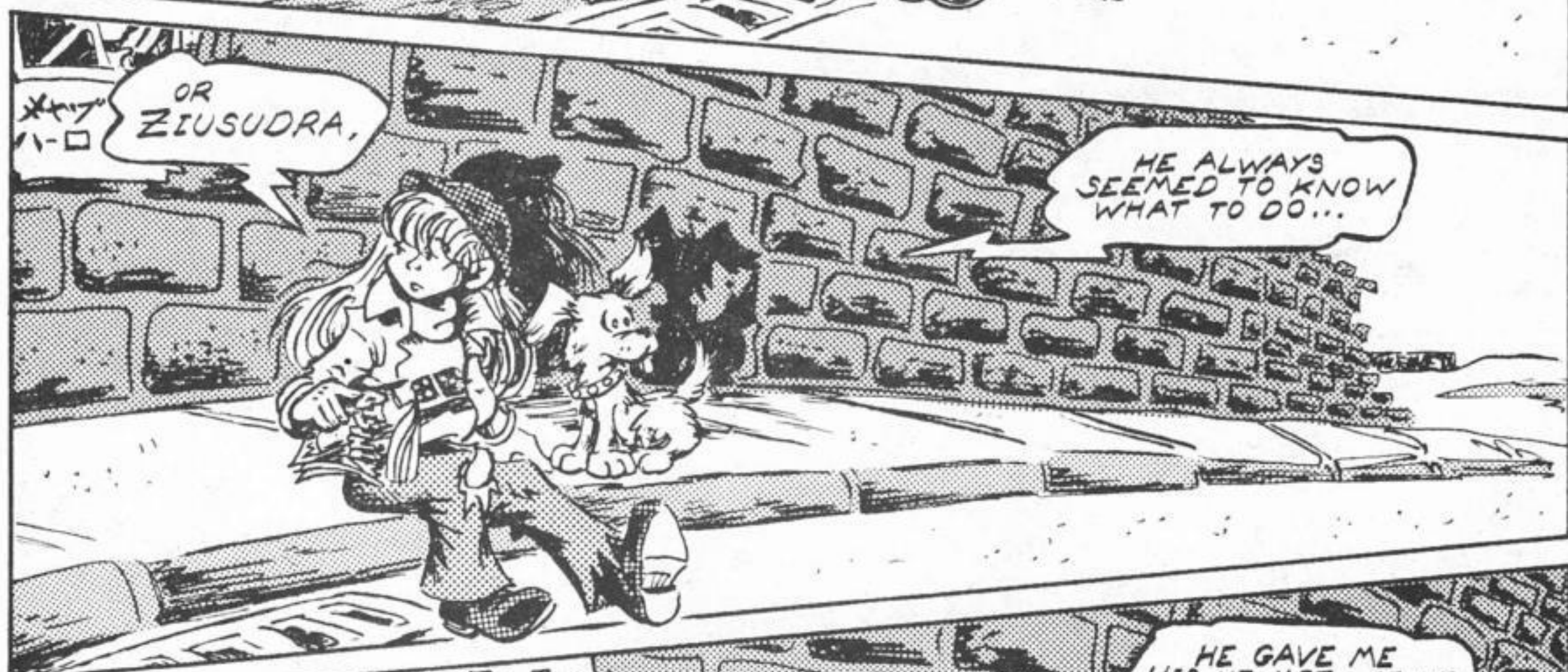
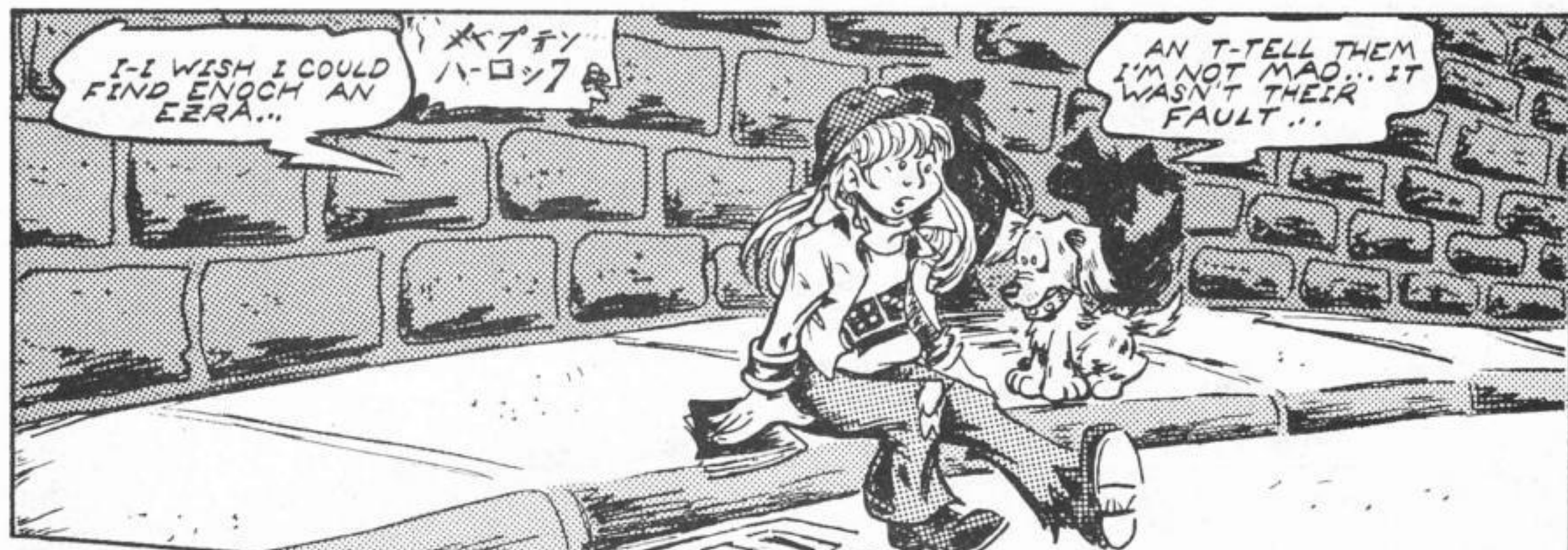
IN THE CYCLE
OF DESTINY...

BUT WE ALL
HAVE TO FACE,
THAT ONE DAY

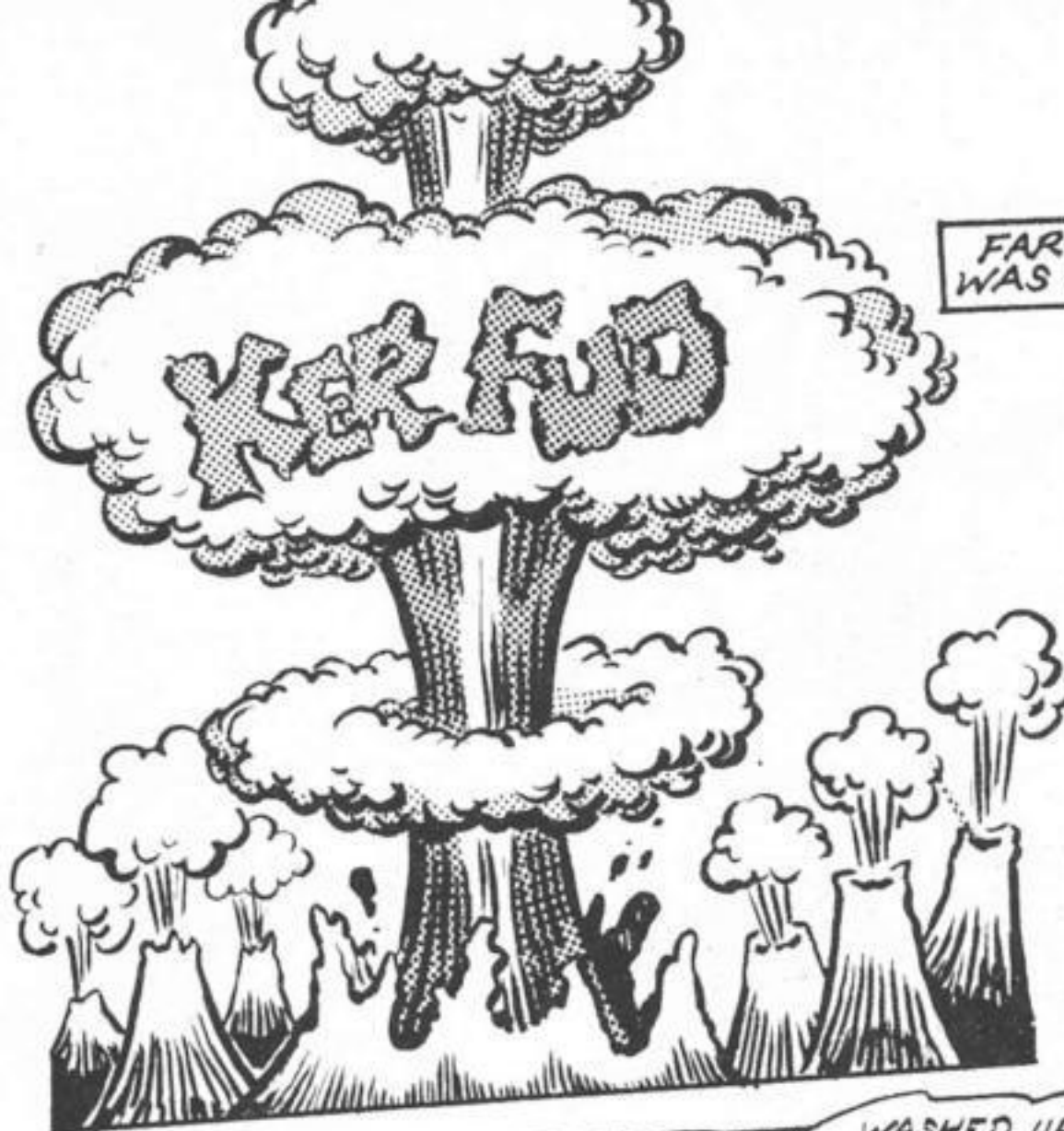
TOMORROW
MAY BE,

THE
DAY AFTER FOR EVER









FAR ACROSS THE BLUE PACIFIC, THERE ONCE WAS AN ISLAND KNOWN AS PINGO PONGO...

BUT NOW...



THE WHOLE ISLAND'S GONE, THE NATIVES ARE GONE... THAT MAD SCIENTIST IS GONE... EVEN OUR SCRIPT HAS WASHED AWAY...

WASHED UP IS MORE LIKE IT!!

AND ME WITH NO BUBBLE BATH...

WHY, THERE'S ONLY ONE THING TO DO AT A TIME LIKE THIS, JUNIOR...

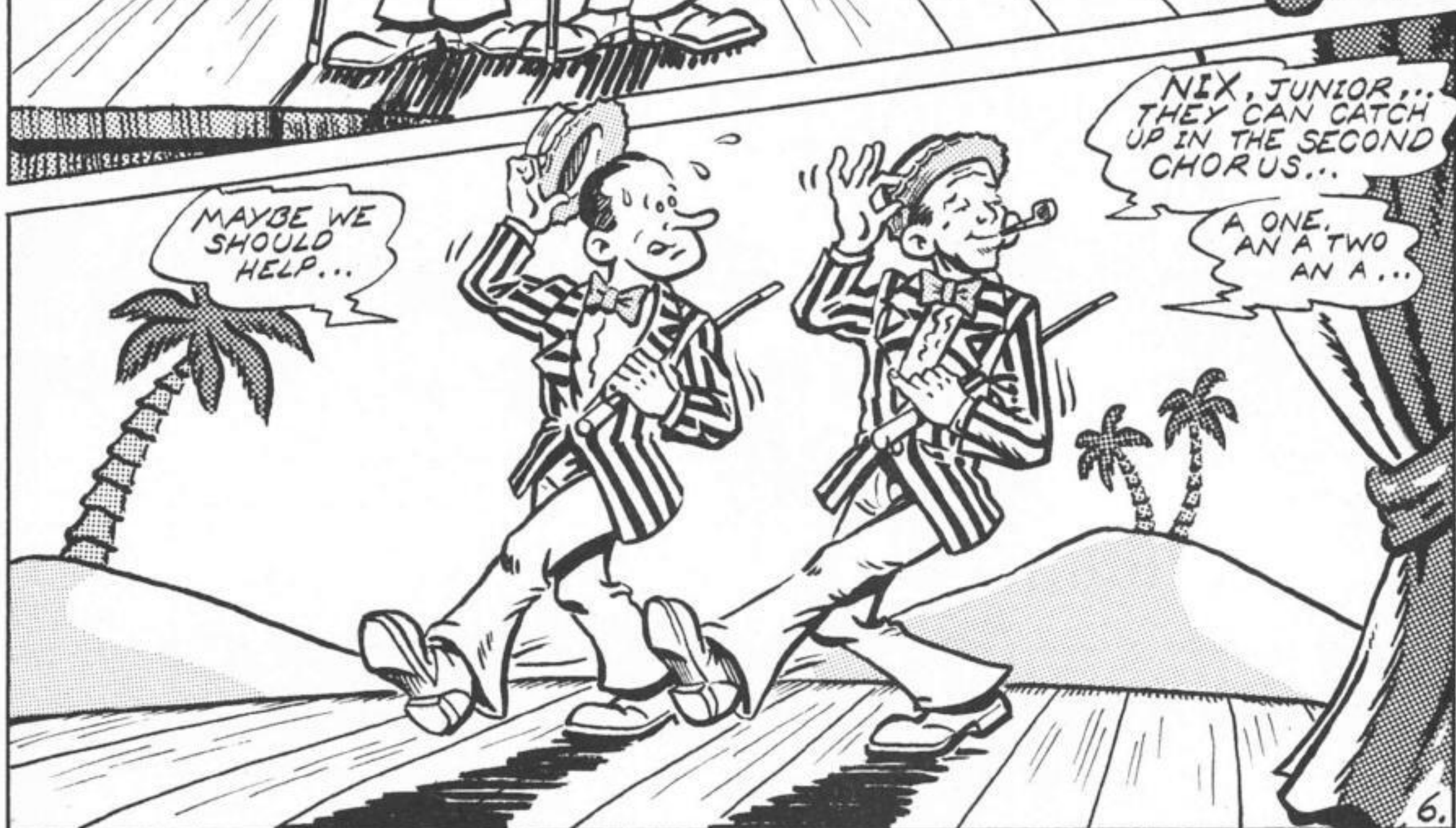
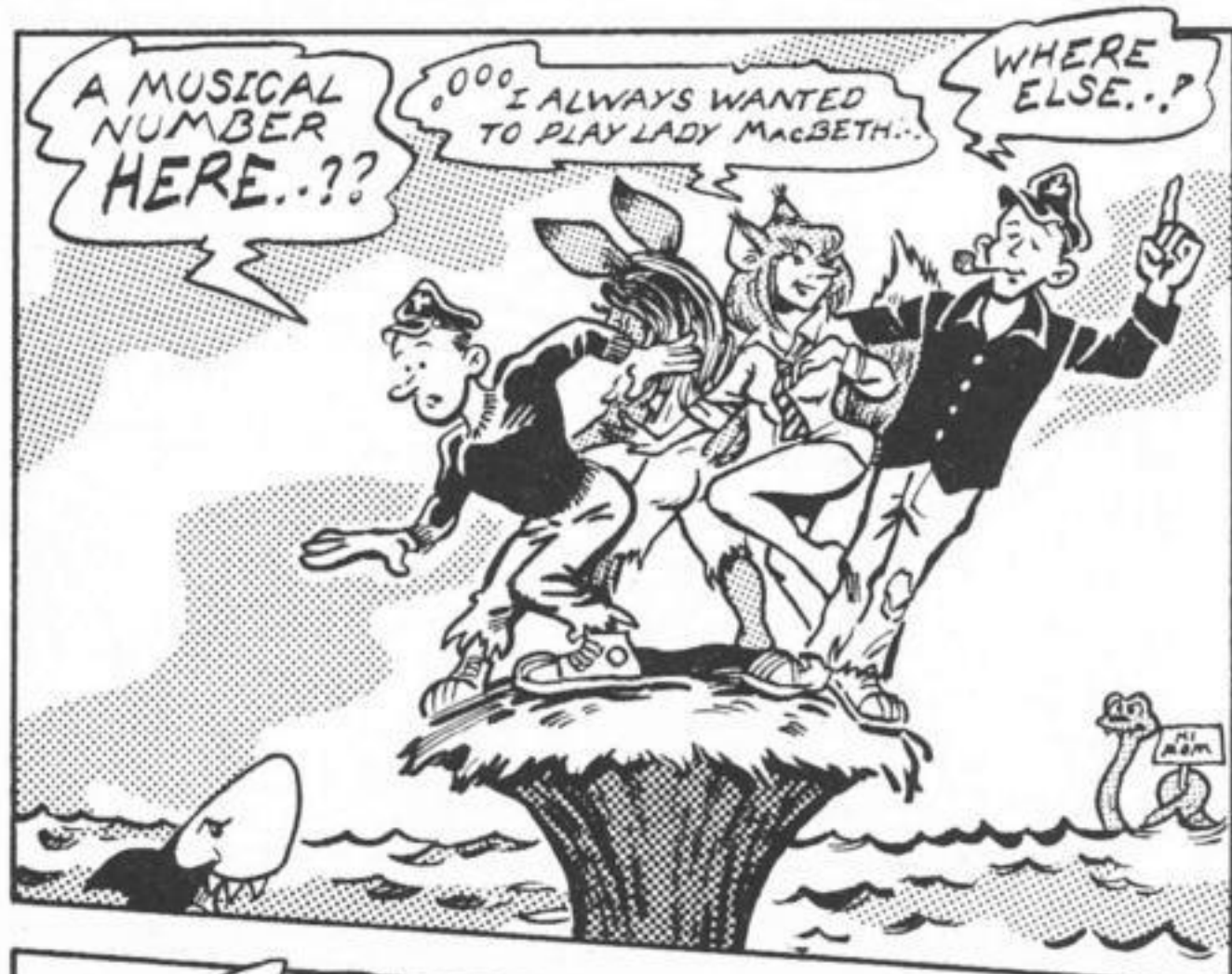
SO WHAT DO WE DO NOW...?



WHAT'S THAT?

A MUSICAL NUMBER, OF COURSE...!

OH GOODY?!







ABOUT
TIME...!

OKAY... WE'RE
READY NOW
BOYS...



WE'RE OFF ON THE ROAD TO PEORIA...
HANG ON TILL THE END OF THE LINE,
I HEAR THIS COUNTRY'S WHERE THEY
DO THE DANCE OF SEVEN VEILS...

WE'D SHOW YOU MORE BUT WE WOULD
HAVE THE CENSORS ON OUR TAILS...



THE MEN EAT FIRE, SLEEP ON NAILS,
I'VE SAW THEIR WIVES IN HALF... IT
SEEMS TO ME, THERE SHOULD BE
A EASIER WAY TO GET A
LAU... HUH??

WHA?

LOOK
THERE HE
IS?!

VAS?



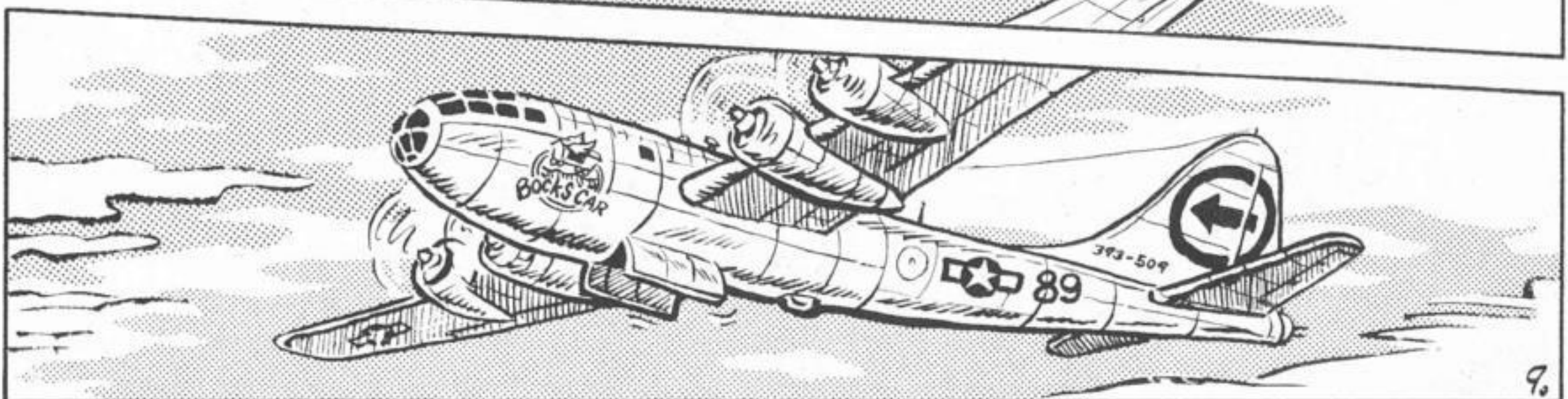
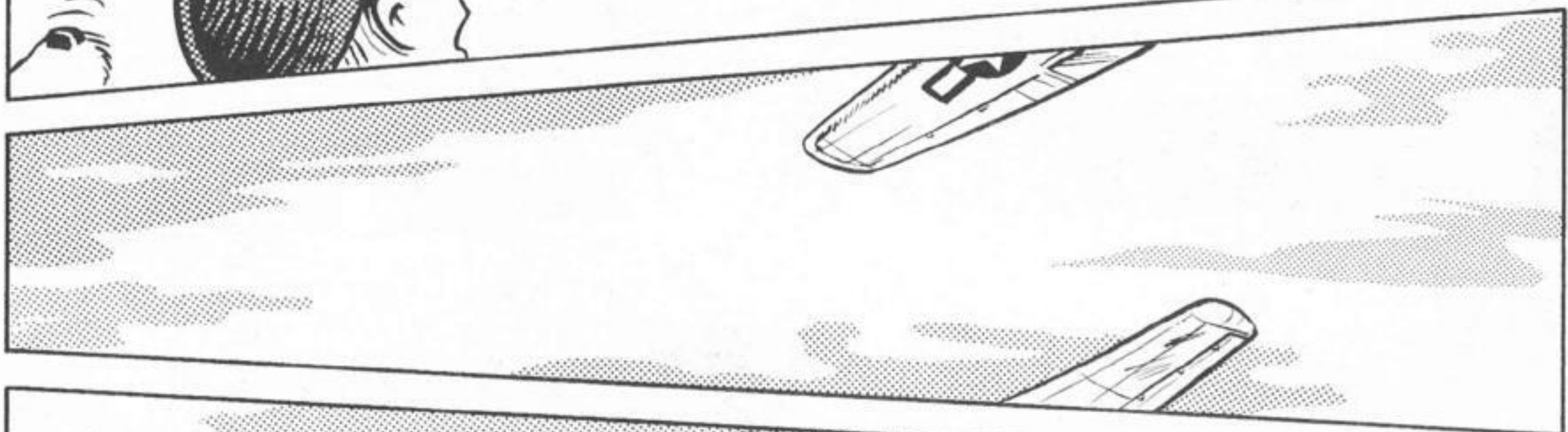
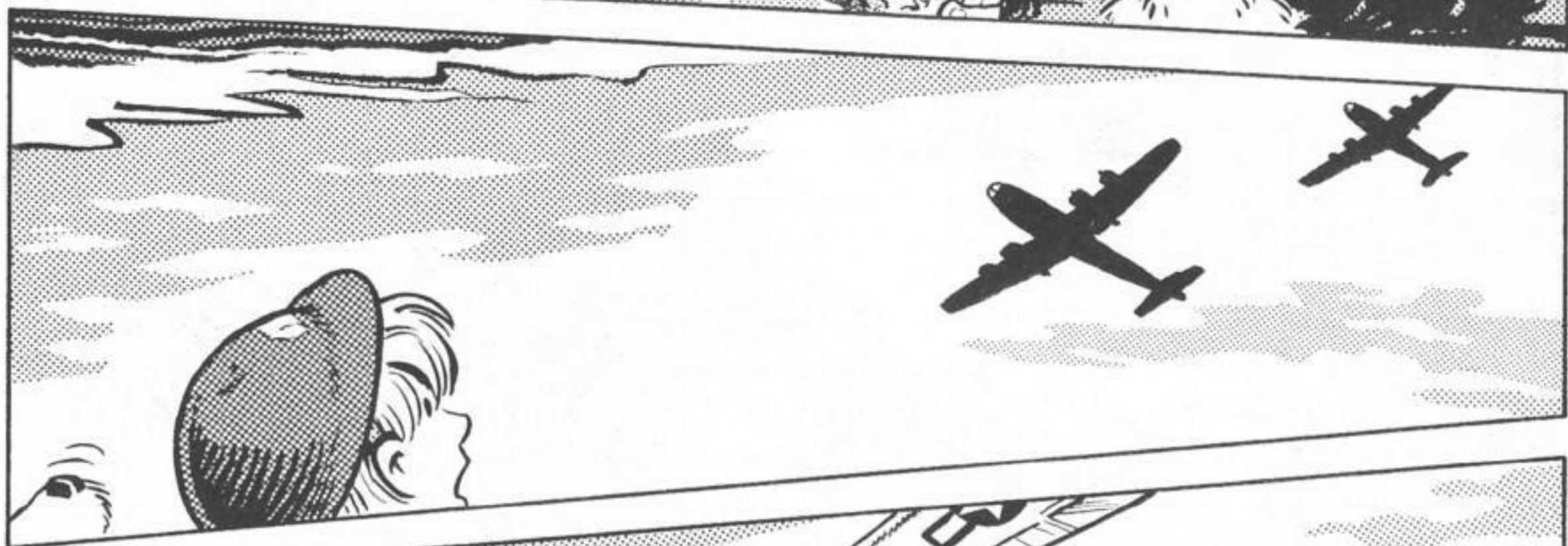
SURRENDER, MASTER CRIMINAL GELVING SHAVINSKY!
I KNEW I'D SPOT YOU IN THE AUDIENCE DURING THE
FIRST CHORUS?!

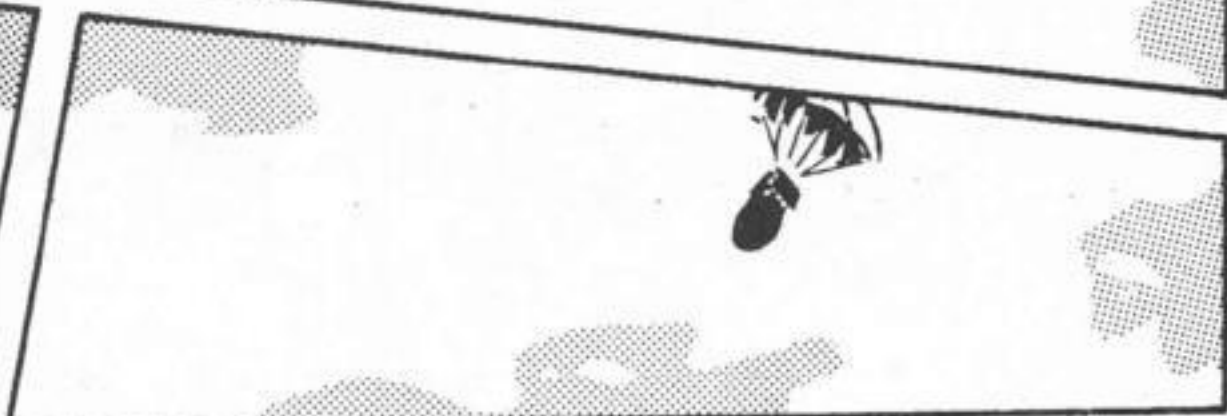
NYA HA HAAAAA,
VERBLUNGENT BUNNY, YOU'LL
NEFER TAKE ME ALIFE..!

PSST,
ISN'T
THIS
THE
THIRD
CHORUS?

WELL... IF SHE
HADN'T TAKEN
MY STOCKINGS...

I LOVE MY
HOOKER
NEFS





ATTENTION RETAILERS!

BYRNE RETURNS



Before **Fantastic Four**... before **The X-Men**... before even **Iron Fist**... the amazing talent of John Byrne was on display in **Doomsday + 1**, an exciting tale of post-holocaust adventurers.

Now Fantagraphics Books is reprinting, in a monthly, full-color, Deluxe format, the entire **Doomsday** saga—including the little-seen seventh issue (presented here in color for the first time!).

Each issue of **John Byrne Classics** features a complete **Doomsday + 1** tale, newly colored by Mark Wheatley and Kathryn Mayer; a brand new cover by Byrne, done especially for this edition; and a bonus short feature spotlighting one of the Fantagraphics Books series: **Dalgoda**, **Lloyd Llewellyn**, **Critters**, **Journey**, etc.

What could make this package hotter? **Neal Adams**, you say? All right, then—the first issue features a **Doomsday** back cover by Neal Adams, newly rendered in full color by Adams himself!

The first issue of **John Byrne Classics** ships in April 1986. Byrne. Adams. Monthly. Deluxe format. Fantagraphics Books. You have been warned.

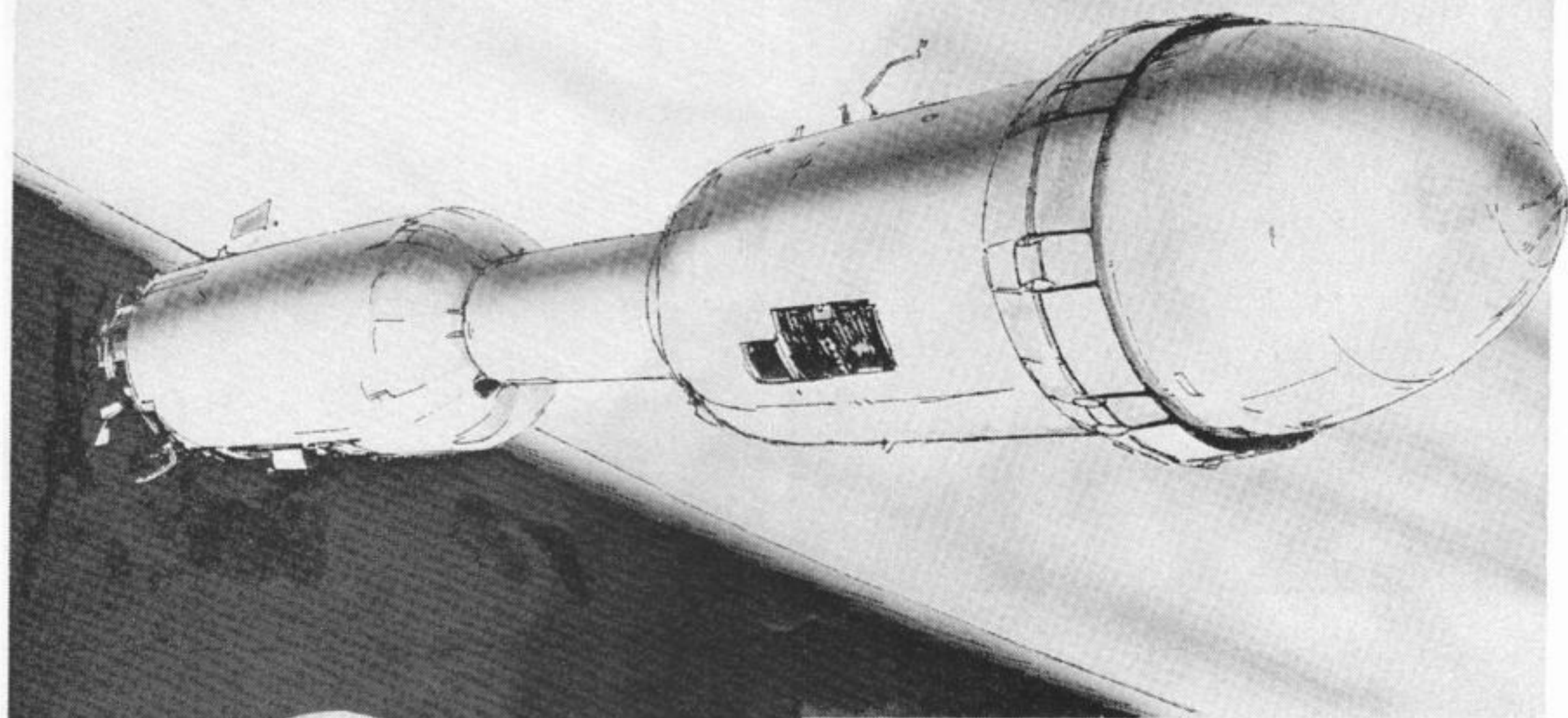
JOHN BYRNE CLASSICS #1

coming in April from

FANTAGRAPHICS BOOKS

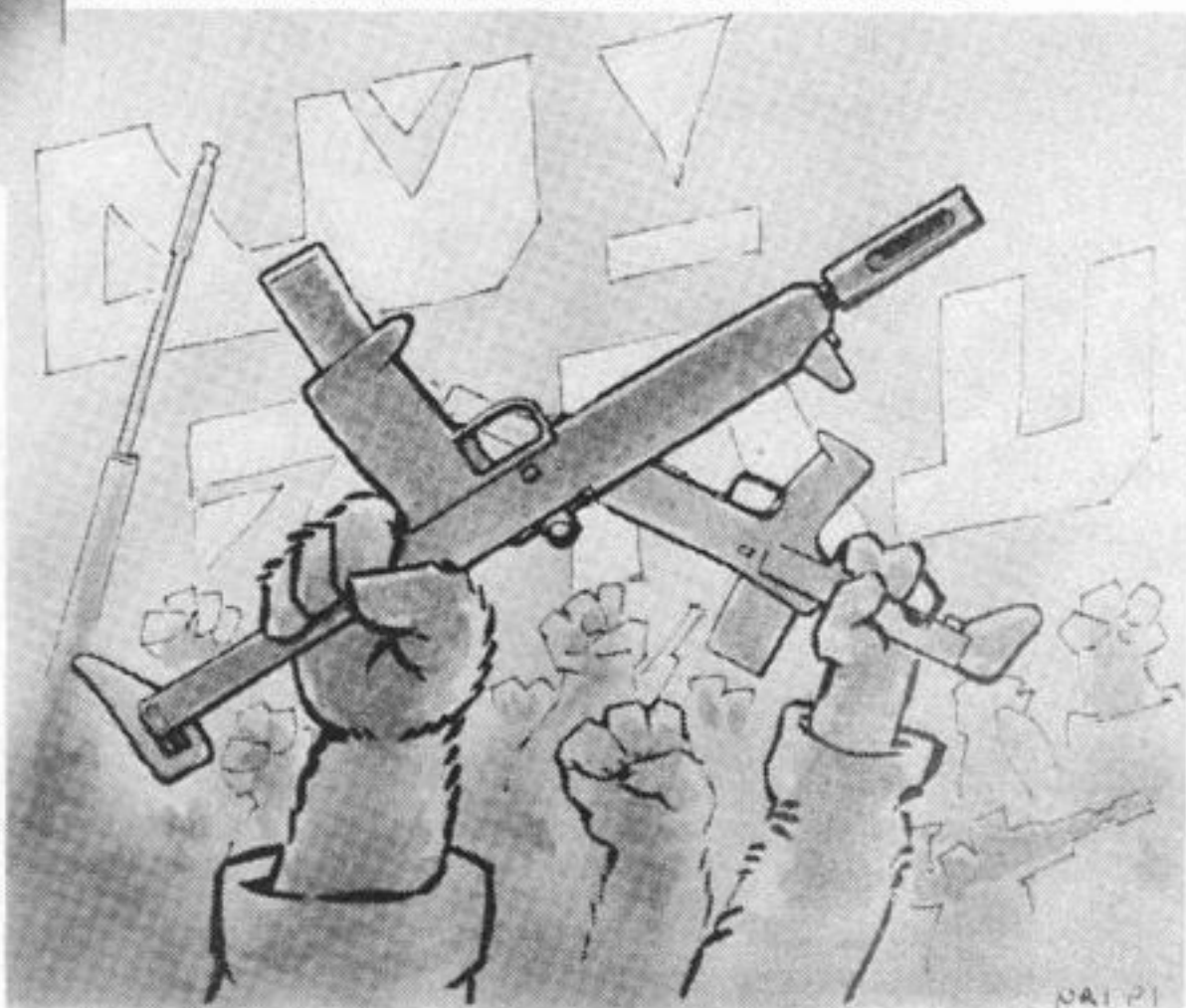
BIRTHRIGHT

S.A.GALLACCI 1985



THE STARFARING SOCIETY THAT HAD SPANNED THE GALAXY AND COLONIZED A THOUSAND STARS WAS IN COLLAPSE. FRATRICIDAL WARS OF ATTRITION HAD KILLED THE CORE OF THE INTERSTELLAR INFRASTRUCTURE AND THE REMAINING FRAGMENTS LACKED THE RESOURCES OR FORESIGHT TO RE-ESTABLISH THEIR HIGH-TECHNOLOGY CAPABILITIES. IN THE EBON SYSTEM, ONCE MIGHTY STAR FLEETS BECAME INOPERATIVE HULKS IN DECAYING ORBITS, AS THE WILL, AND EVENTUALLY, THE ABILITY TO SUPPORT THEM WAS LOST. THE REALIZATION OF DWINDLING RESOURCES MOTIVATED A SERIES OF EXPENSIVE BUT INCONCLUSIVE WARS WHICH ONLY SERVED TO CONSUME NOW IRREPLACEABLE ASSETS EVEN FASTER. WHAT WASN'T DESTROYED IN WAR WAS CANNIBALIZED TO MAINTAIN AN EVER-SHRINKING INDUSTRIAL BASE.

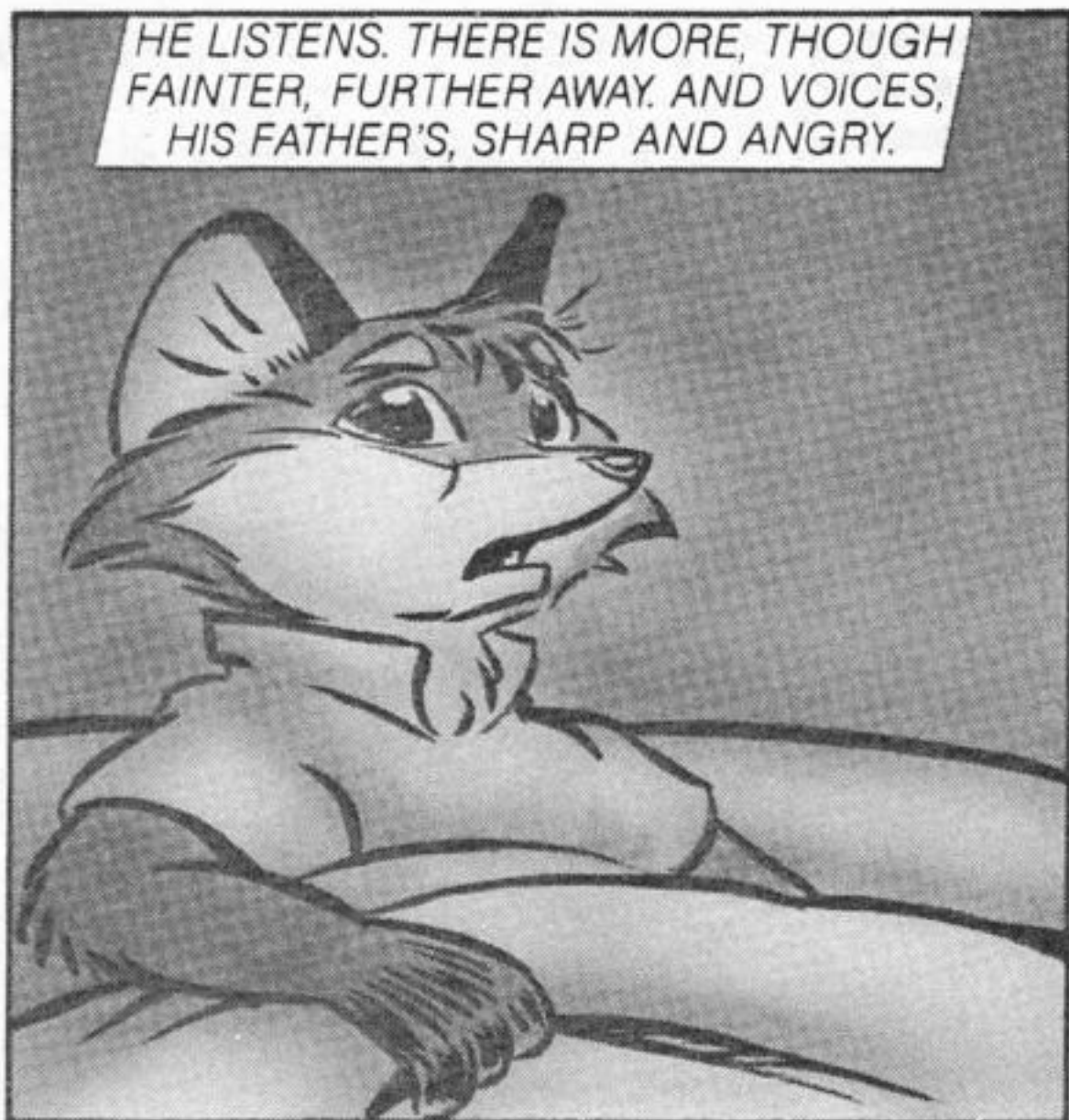
AS THE TECHNO-ECONOMIC CONDITION DETERIORATED, MANY OF THE FREEDOMS AND OPPORTUNITIES PREVIOUSLY ENJOYED COULD NO LONGER BE MAINTAINED. THE NEW ORDERS WERE OFTEN SUPPORTED BY FORCE, WHICH IN TURN ENCOURAGED CYCLES OF REVOLUTION. SHARTOA, UNDER THE KASHOKA PRINCES RULE, HAD MANAGED SOME MEASURE OF STABILITY FOR ITS PEOPLE AND SECURITY ON ITS BORDERS. BUT PRINCE ANTON, INTENT ON AN INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC COOPERATIVE, FAILS TO ATTEND TO DOMESTIC UNREST AND THE HOSTILE TOSIU.



THE DISTANT CRACKLE OF WEAPONS
FIRE JOLTS A CHILD AWAKE.



HE LISTENS. THERE IS MORE, THOUGH
FAINTER, FURTHER AWAY. AND VOICES,
HIS FATHER'S, SHARP AND ANGRY.



And I can assure you, Your Excellency,
that my ministry is blameless.



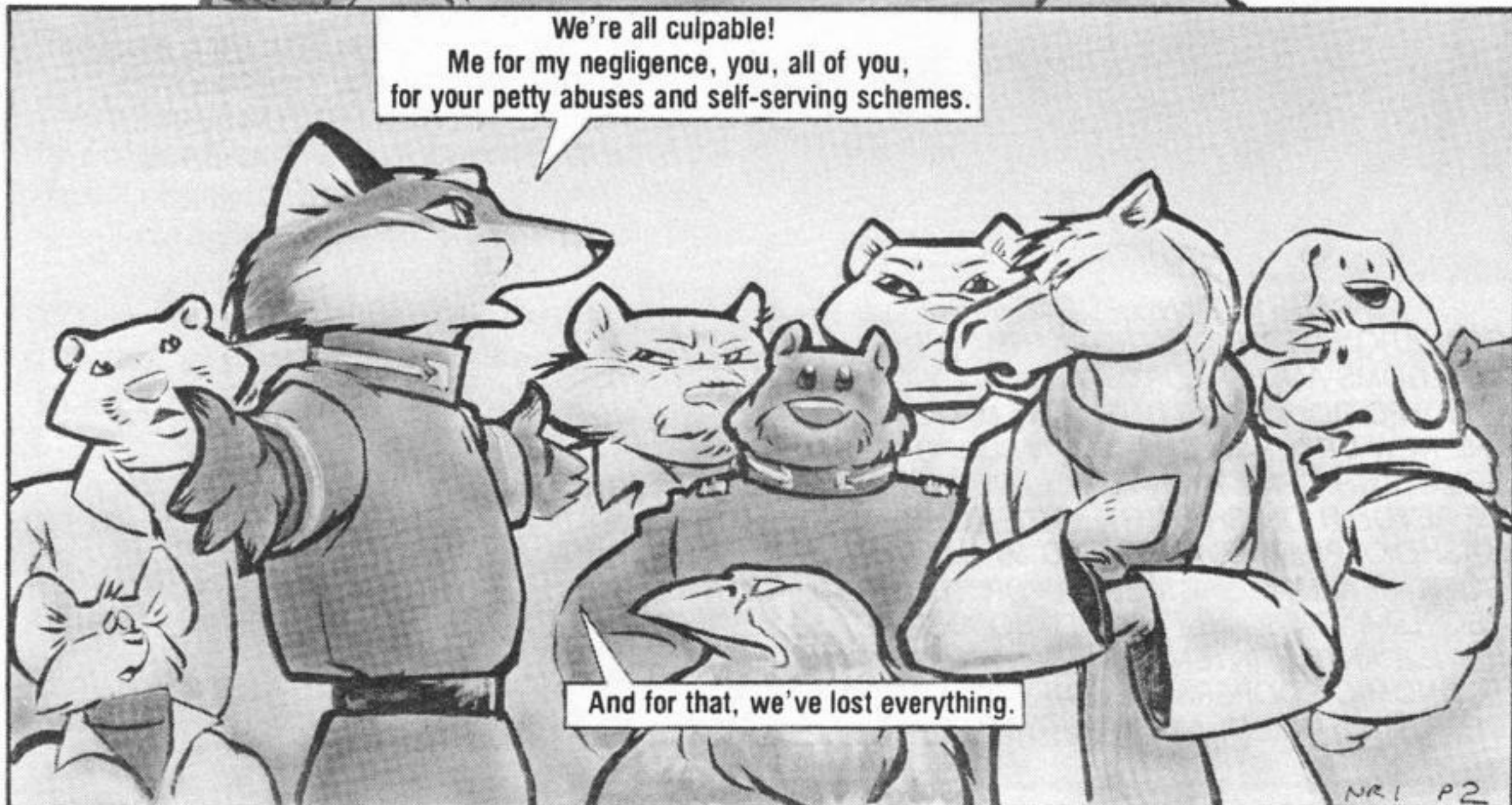
What!

We're about to be overrun
by rebels and Tosiu "peacekeepers"
and all you can do is try to fix blame?

It wasn't me!

Where's Actuan?
Ask him!

We're all culpable!
Me for my negligence, you, all of you,
for your petty abuses and self-serving schemes.



And for that, we've lost everything.

NR1 P2

There are critical services that must be maintained for as long as possible.



I'd hope there'd be some among you that would . . .



For the rest, there's still time to get to evacuation points.



Ah, good evening, Your Excellency.

OH!

Is it really that bad, Major Duwan?



I'm afraid so, Your Excellency.



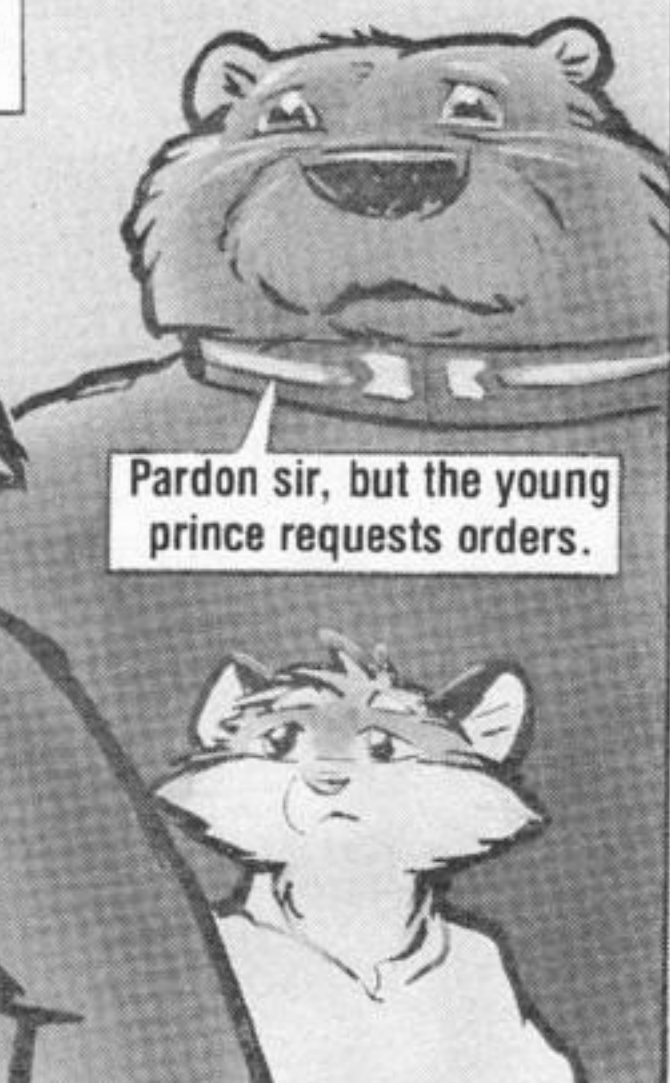
Your excellency! A major force has breached the inner perimeter.



Ewhohick, use your remaining forces to assist any last-minute evacuees. Then delay the Tosiu as you can.



Pardon sir, but the young prince requests orders.



So, orders.

Very well, Prince Alfon, you and the major will see to the evacuation of the Princess Kenda and the remaining civilians from the aid center.



Son, your mother is going to need you. So, be strong for her, I . . .



Now get dressed! A Kashota prince doesn't go into battle in a nightshirt.



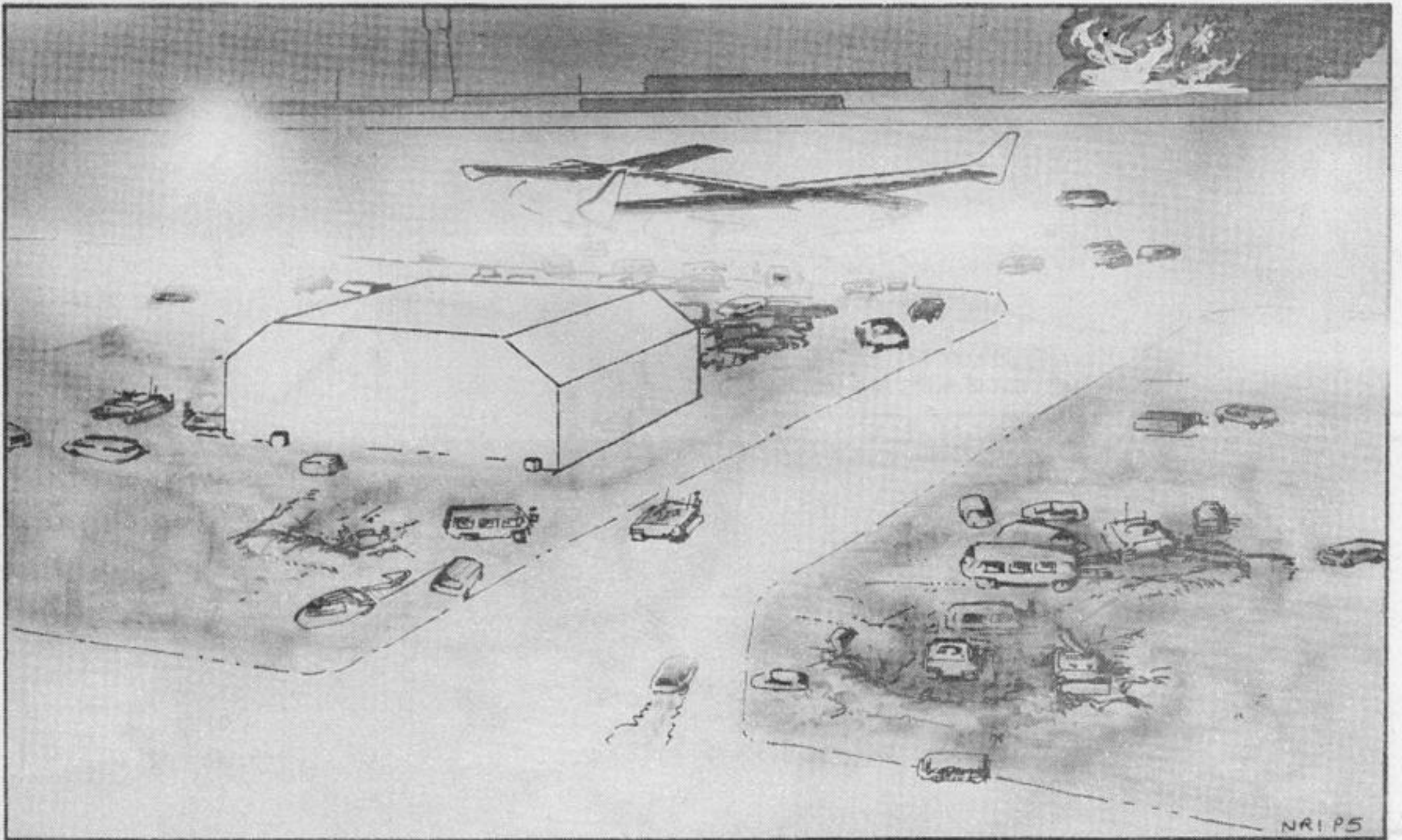
Major Duwan, watch after him. And when the time comes, give him this.

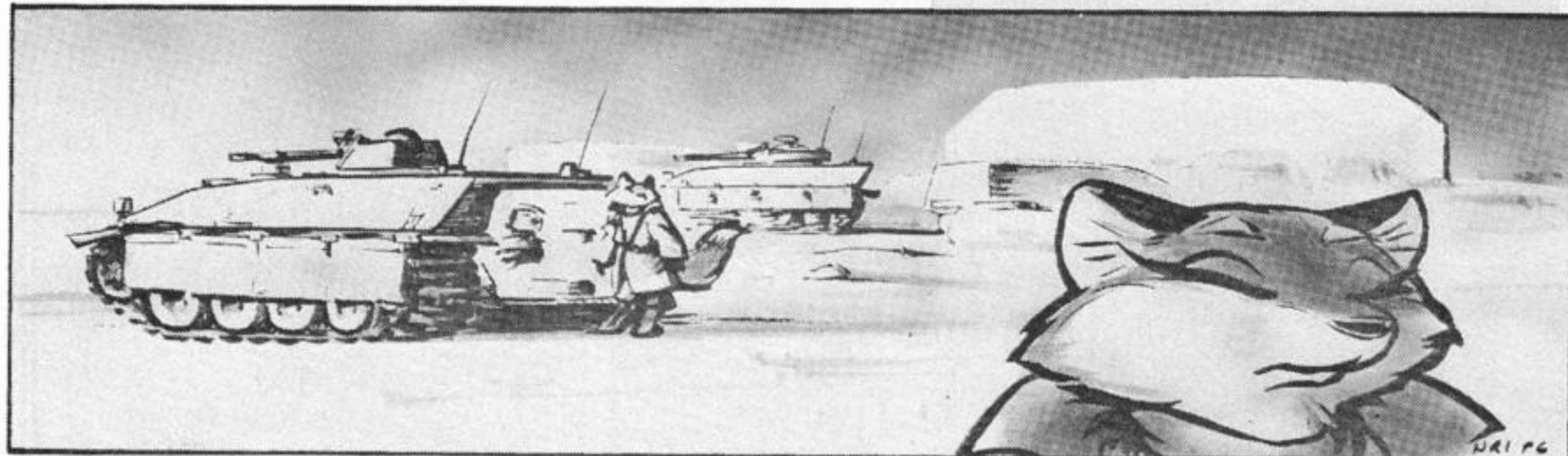
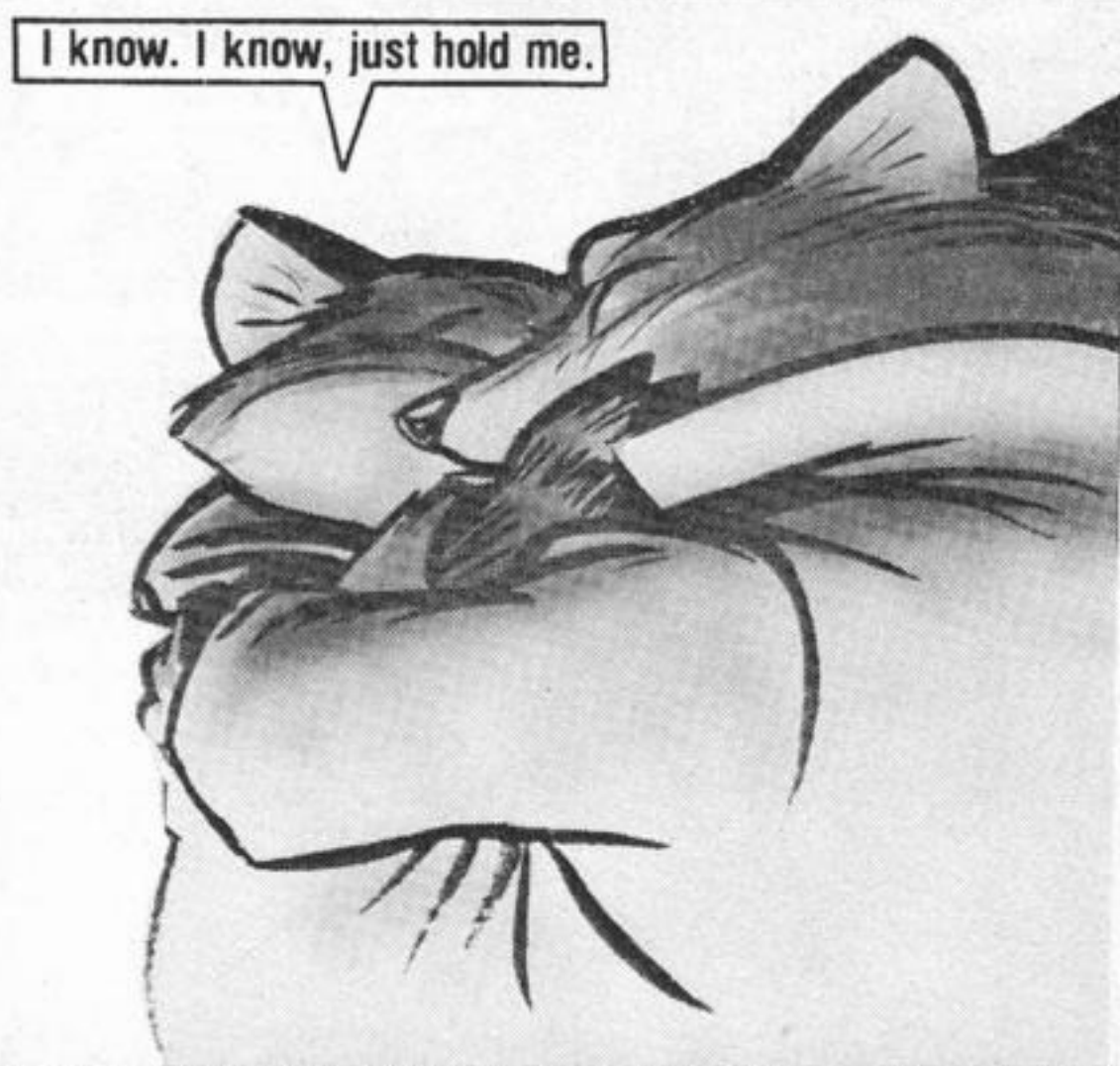
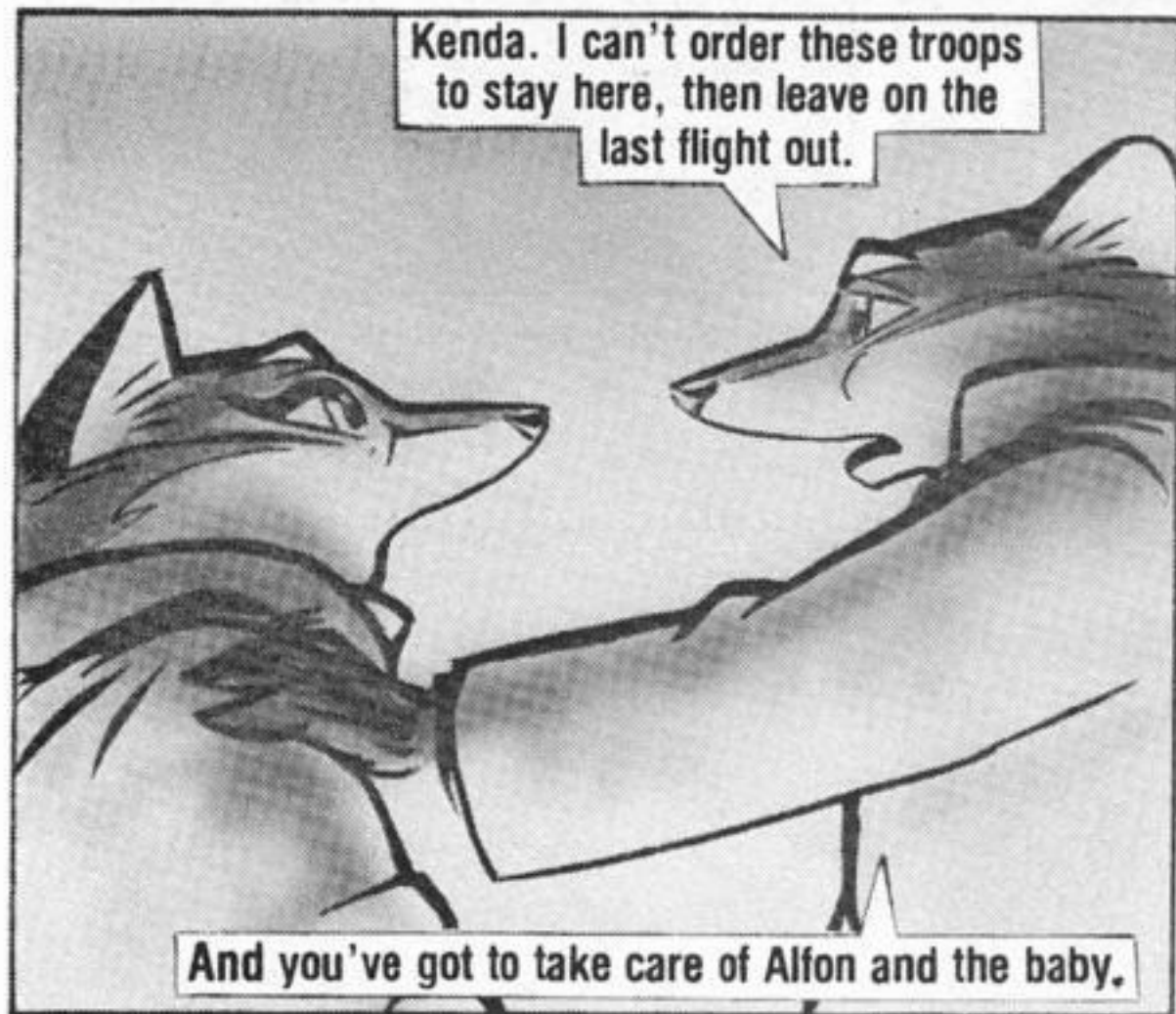
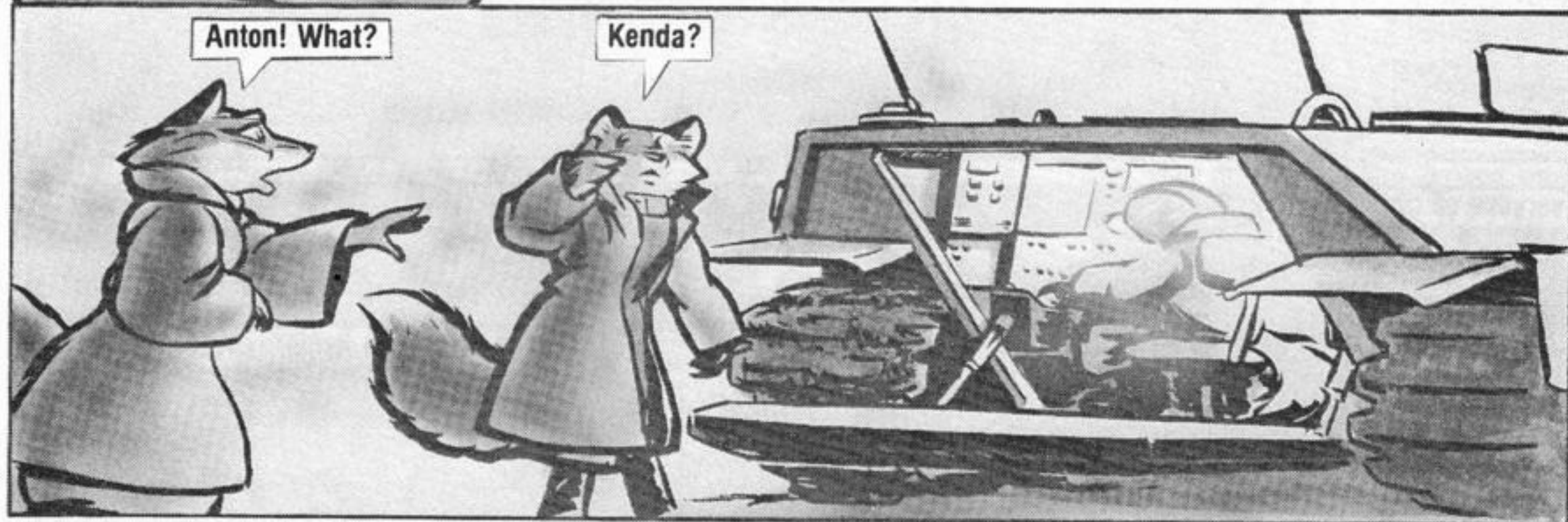
The ring? Surely you intend . . . ?

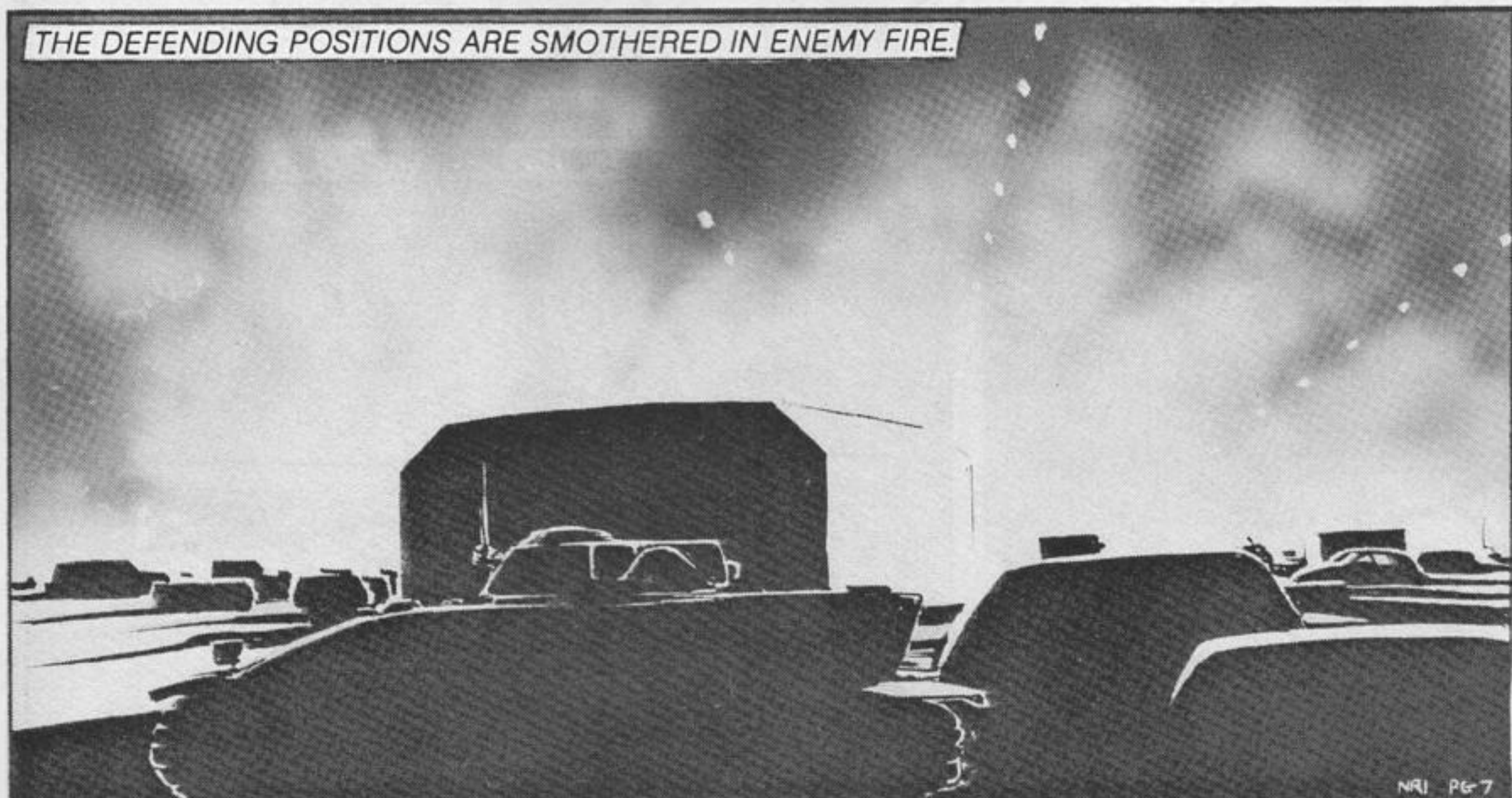
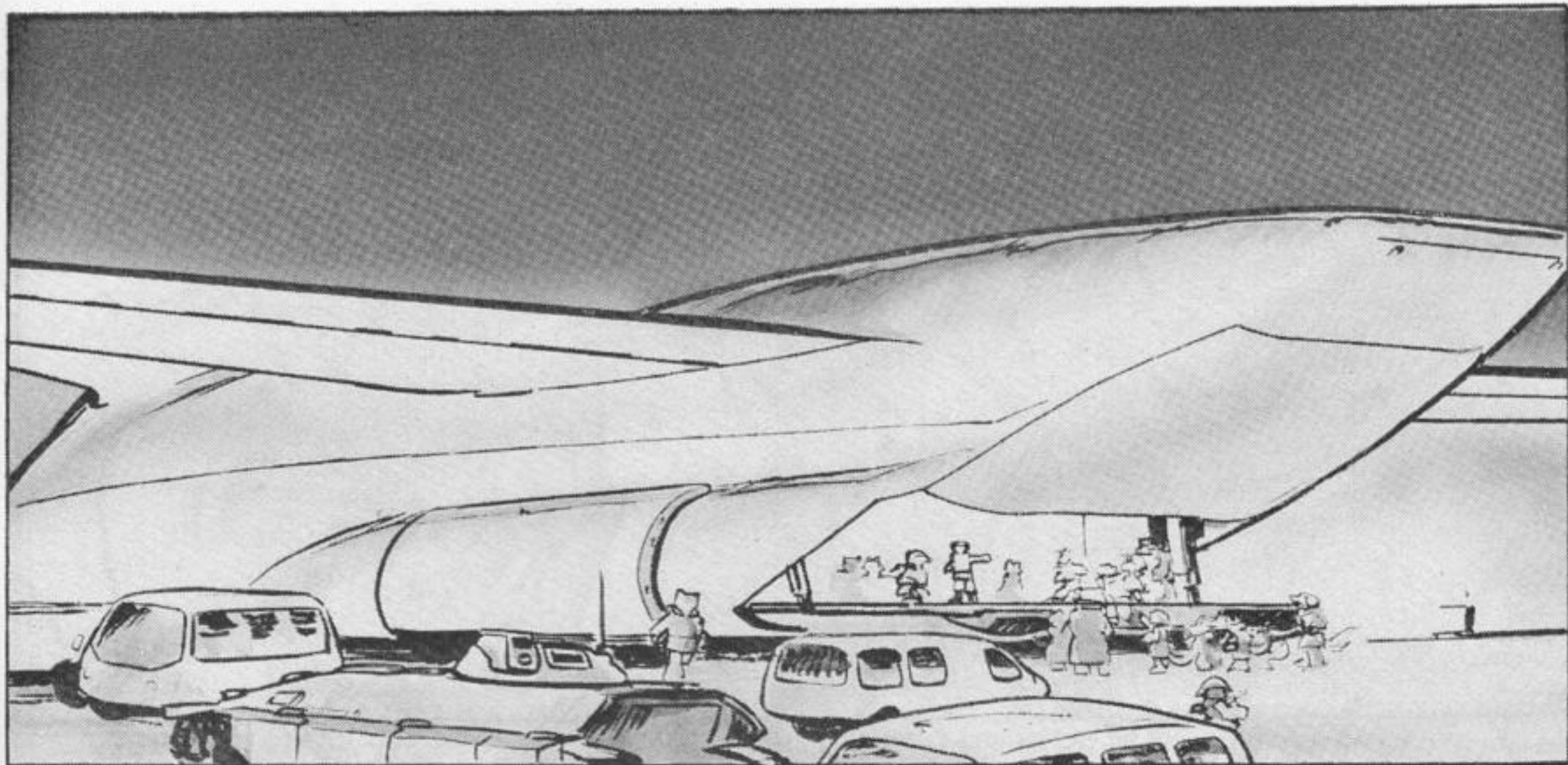


No. I'll be with the rear guard.

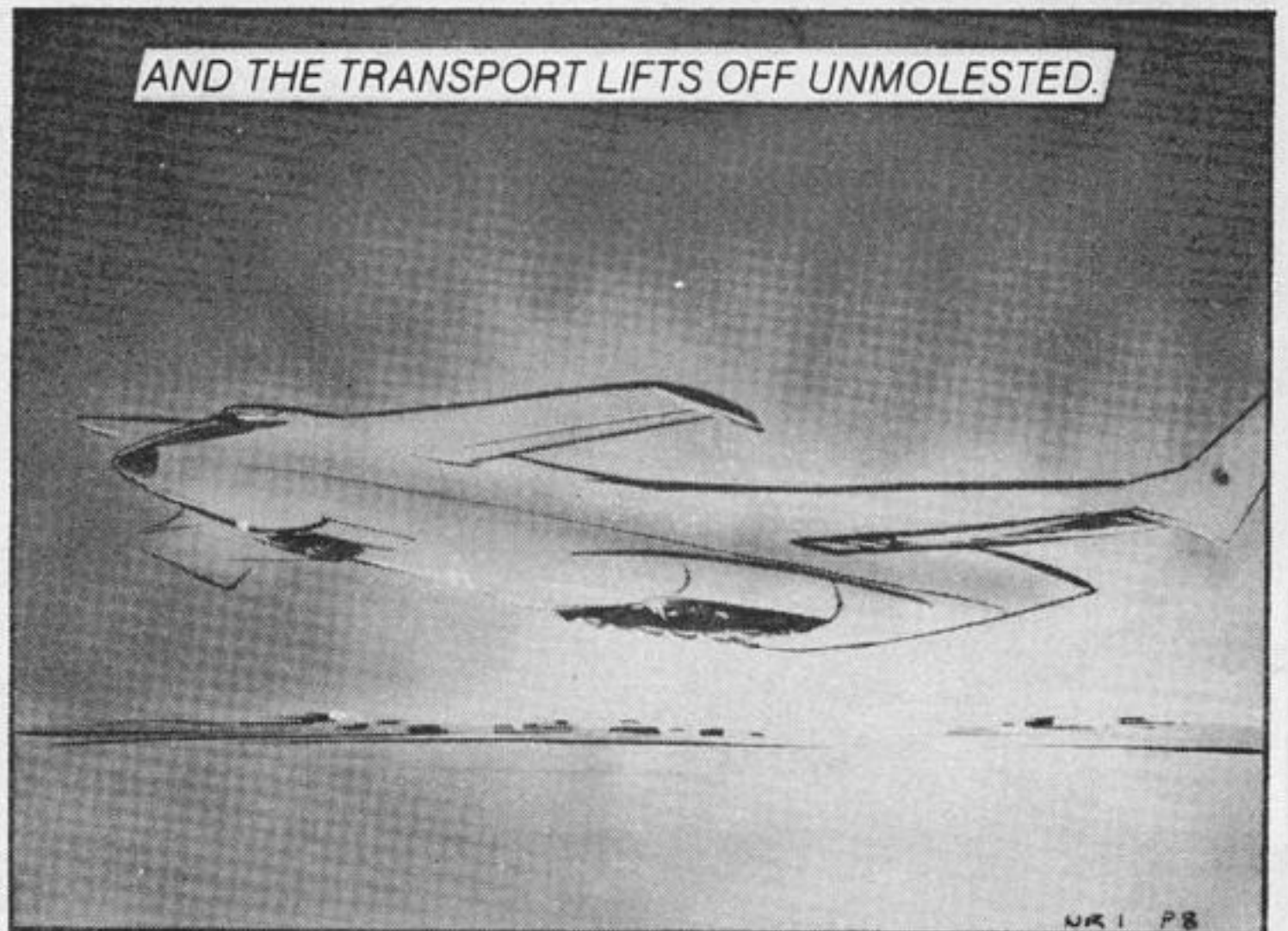
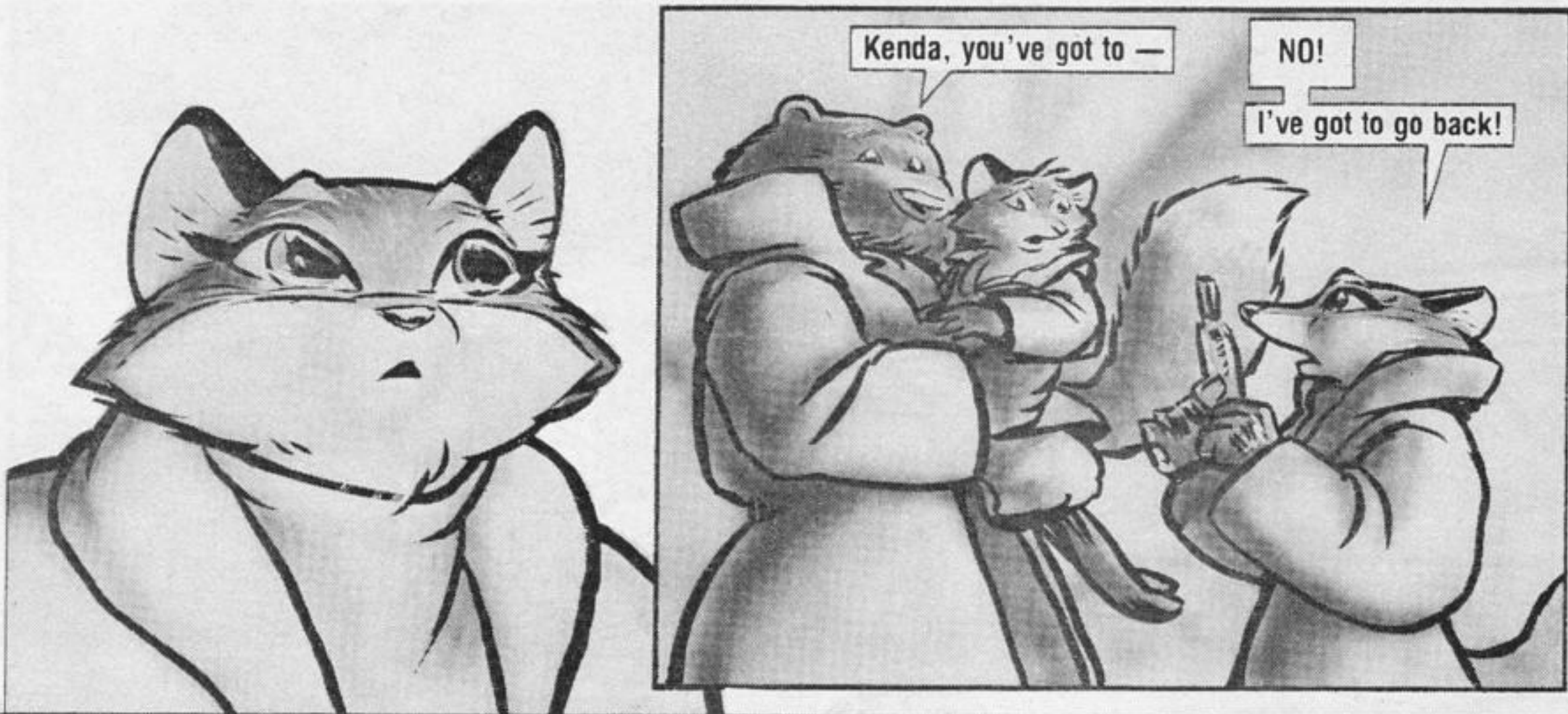








NRI PG 7



SURVEYING THE CARNAGE THAT REMAINS, GENERAL RAU TAN THEOK IS DISQUIETED WITH THE HOLLOWNESS OF HIS VICTORY.



THIS IS NOT A SKILLED AND ABLE FOE HE HAS DEFEATED. THESE RESERVISTS AND INADEQUATELY ARMED CIVILIANS WERE A POOR MATCH FOR HIS SHOCK TROOPS.

HE IS SURPRISED TO SEE A FAMILIAR FACE,



THEOK PRIDES HIMSELF ON HIS TACTICAL FINESSE AND IS REPULSED BY THE WASTE OF LIVES, EVEN OF HIS OPPONENTS.



THE SHARTOAN PRINCE.



AND EVEN MORE SURPRISED TO DISCOVER THAT HE AND HIS PRINCESS STILL LIVE.

The Tosiu peacekeeping forces in Shartoa have announced that with the death of Prince Anton and neutralization of hostile forces in the capital, they can provide stability for Shartoan reconstruction.



NR1 P.9

[TO BE CONTINUED]

CONT'D FROM INSIDE FRONT COVER

tastes of the audience; as well as consistently dopey business moves by the now-expired "other" (viz., not Marvel or DC) mainstream comics publishers, who once controlled the market. But the bottom line is that for the first time since comics began, there are virtually no funny-animal, or even funny, comics available.

There are rays of hope, true. Even as we speak, Bruce Hamilton is preparing an entire line of titles, Gladstone Comics, with which he intends to put back into general circulation those classic Disney tales. And if you look around you, funny-animal titles are creeping up on little cat feet here and there—a merry profusion of works that stretches from the vivid eroticism of **Omaha**, **Cat Dancer** to the childlike charm of **Neil the Horse**, from the straight, classical adventure of **Albedo** to the wacky kitchen-sink comedy of **Cutey Bunny**, from the gently retro whimsy of **Maxwell Mouse Follies** to the punk aggression of **Dog Boy**. Not to mention the indescribable **Cerebus**. Or **Maus**.

Funny-animal comics are possessed of an enchantment almost mystical in nature. The inherent irreality of the concept gives them an instant fantastical quality, and, paradoxically, a **reality** that far exceeds the dulled naturalism of "realistic" comics. As a result, many of the most evocative comic books and strips ever done fall into the funny-animal category.

Nor is this just the nostalgia of someone smitten by Barks at an early age. No less an authority than Mike Barrier—as close to unimpeachable a critic as you're apt to get in this medium—once stated: "...[I]f the comic strip ever rises to the level of art (or if it has already, as I believe) it will do so in the shape of a 'funny-animal' strip."

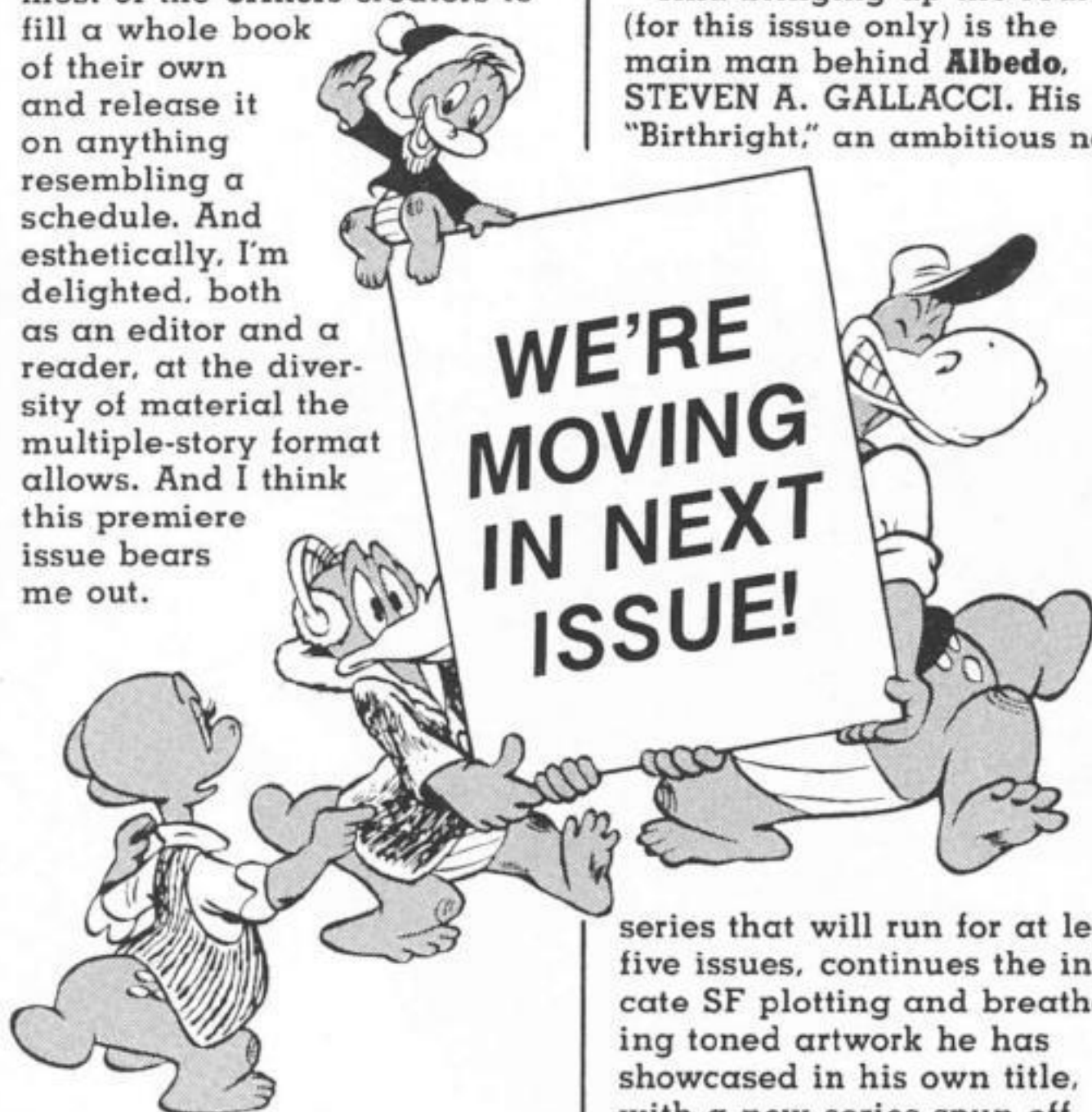
Barrier wrote that 15 years ago. But if I were to count up the comics that give and have given me genuine pleasure, there are, proportionately, an awful lot of funny-animal series among them.

This title—**Critters** by name—is devoted to keeping alive the tradition of the funny-animal comic.

The idea of doing a funny-animal anthology book stems

from a suggestion made by JOSHUA QUAGMIRE, creator of the antic **Cutey Bunny**, a couple of years back. Noting the resurgence of self-published funny-animal comics (very specifically including Stan Sakai, Steve Gallacci, and himself), J.Q. suggested that assembling them into one book might be a good idea. I thought it was. It is.

I have always been fond of anthology titles, for reasons that combine the esthetic and the practical. Practically, anthology titles don't put the creators under as big a strain as "solo" titles: it would be difficult, if not impossible, for most of the **Critters** creators to fill a whole book of their own and release it on anything resembling a schedule. And esthetically, I'm delighted, both as an editor and a reader, at the diversity of material the multiple-story format allows. And I think this premiere issue bears me out.



After crediting Josh with the germ of the idea that became **Critters**, I wish I could say he and I were on good terms, but we aren't. Josh's intro to his story in this issue hints somewhat darkly at differences between the two of us. Indeed, in the past year, our relationship has gone from mild disagreement to arguments to outright hostility.

One of the results of this clash, as Josh mentions, is that his story presented herein is not the one previously announced ("Return to Egypt"), but a last-minute substitution that drastically curtails Josh's involvement—permanently, most likely—in **Critters**. Ironically, I believe it's Josh's best story yet, a departure in style and intent that spins off

a sequence from one of the earliest Cutey stories. Even if Josh's and my paths never cross again, I would urge him to continue exploring the lode he has uncovered with this tale.

Upfront in this issue is STAN SAKAI's **Usagi Yojimbo**. Previous installments of this utterly delightful series have appeared in Thought & Image's small-circulation **Albedo**. It's a privilege to be able to present Stan's work to a larger audience than he has ever had for his comic-book work—unless you count his (excellent) lettering for **Groo**, that is.

And bringing up the rear (for this issue only) is the main man behind **Albedo**, STEVEN A. GALLACCI. His "Birthright," an ambitious new

series that will run for at least five issues, continues the intricate SF plotting and breathtaking toned artwork he has showcased in his own title, with a new series spun off from concepts premiered in **Albedo**.

A side note: every time a funny-animal strip appears that is not predominantly humorous in style or content, there are always a few cranks who maintain that a funny-animal strip should, by definition, be funny. Anticipating the same old saw concerning "Birthright," I would reply that a funny-animal strip has no greater duty to be funny than a comic book has to be comical.

Still, I should admit that even I was a little taken aback by the dark mood of this premiere issue (helped along by the wistfulness of the first half of this editorial, I'm afraid). This is coincidence: Quagmire's unexpectedly

bleak fantasy (replacing what was intended to be a typically wokka-wokka-wokka Cutey epic) plays off the premiere of "Birthright" (out of structural necessity a somewhat down-beat introduction), with the mayhem of Sakai's samurai strip providing the somewhat grim levity.

Although I'm proud of the issue—I believe, in fact, that each story shows each creator at his peak—future installments should show a swing toward a little more upbeat feeling. Especially when Freddy Milton's "Gnuff" comes along in #2...but I'll tell you about "Gnuff" next time.

By all accounts, **Critters** should reach a much wider audience than any of the features therein have before attained, so it seems only fair to point out the availability of earlier works. All five issues of **Cutey Bunny**—each containing a straight 30 pages of Quagmire looniness—priced at \$2.00 each postpaid, are available from Joshua Quagmire, P.O. Box 2221, Hollywood, CA 90078. Similarly, issues three through five of **Albedo** are available for \$2.50 each postpaid from Steven A. Gallacci, PO Box 19419, Seattle, WA 98109. All contain Gallacci's "Erma Felna of the EDF" serial, and all feature stories by Stan Sakai—including a marvelous two-part "Usagi Yojimbo" tale in #3-4. The first two issues of **Albedo** are currently out of print and will not be reprinted (collectors, on your marks!), but virtually all the material seen therein should soon again be available.

I should also give special thanks to the other people who made this issue possible: TOM LUTH, who colored the cover (and isn't it a honey?); DAVE GARCIA, who inked part of the "Cutey" tale, and DICK GLASS, who Zip-a-Toned all of it; and FREDDY and INGO MILTON, who created the logo.

I could go on, but this is a picture book and I've taken more than enough of your time with words. After a very long incubation period, **Critters** is finally hatched. Letters are not only invited or welcomed, but **demand**ed. And we'll see you in 30 days with **Critters** #2!

—KIM THOMPSON

This premiere issue of **CRITTERS** is dedicated to my mother, my father, and Carl Barks.

CREDITS: The "Usagi Yojimbo" story was written and illustrated by Stan Sakai. The "Cutey Bunny" story was written, pencilled, and lettered by Joshua Quagmire, and inked by Quagmire (pp. 1-3, 9-10) and Dave Garcia (the rest); Dick Glass supplied the Zip-a-Tone. "Birthright" was written and illustrated by Steven A. Gallacci, with typesetting provided by Western Type. The cover was designed by Stan Sakai, pencilled by Joshua Quagmire, inked by Gallacci, Quagmire, and Sakai, and colored by Tom Luth. The CRITTERS logo was designed by Freddy Milton and rendered by Ingo Milton. Printed at Port Publications. Tom Mason was the art director. **CRITTERS** is edited by Kim Thompson for FANTAGRAPHICS BOOKS.

SUBSCRIBE TODAY!

Would you like to know what happens to young Prince Alfon? Are you eager to see more of Usagi Yojimbo? Are you curious as to what "Gnuff" and "Captain Jack" could possibly be? Does it puzzle you what other things we could have up our sleeves for future issues? Well, in that case, you have no option but to **subscribe** to **CRITTERS** and every issue will be delivered to your doorstep!



Begin my subscription to **Critters** with the next issue off the presses! I enclose a check or money order for \$9.00 for the next 6 issues (outside U.S., \$11.00 in U.S. funds).

name _____

address _____

state/prov. _____ zip/country _____

Send to:

CRITTERS SUBS, 4359 Cornell Rd., Agoura Hills, California 91301.

(Please make check or money order payable to CRITTERS. Allow 6-8 weeks for your first copy to arrive. All copies mailed in protective envelopes.)

Life on the Michigan frontier was filled with Adventure, Fear, Battle, Murder, and Death . . .



. . .and then there were the Bad Days.

JOURNEY™

**The Adventures of Wolverine MacAlistaire
PUBLISHED MONTHLY BY FANTAGRAPHICS BOOKS**

© 1985 William Messner-Loebs

- ☐ This looks like one different comic! Please send me one sample copy of JOURNEY. I have enclosed \$2.00 (outside U.S.: \$2.50).
- ☐ Okay, I'm convinced! Send me the next 6 issues of JOURNEY! I've enclosed \$9.00 in U.S. funds (outside U.S.: \$11.00).

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

Send to: JOURNEY, 4359 Cornell Road, Agoura, CA 91301. Please allow 6-8 weeks for delivery of first issue.