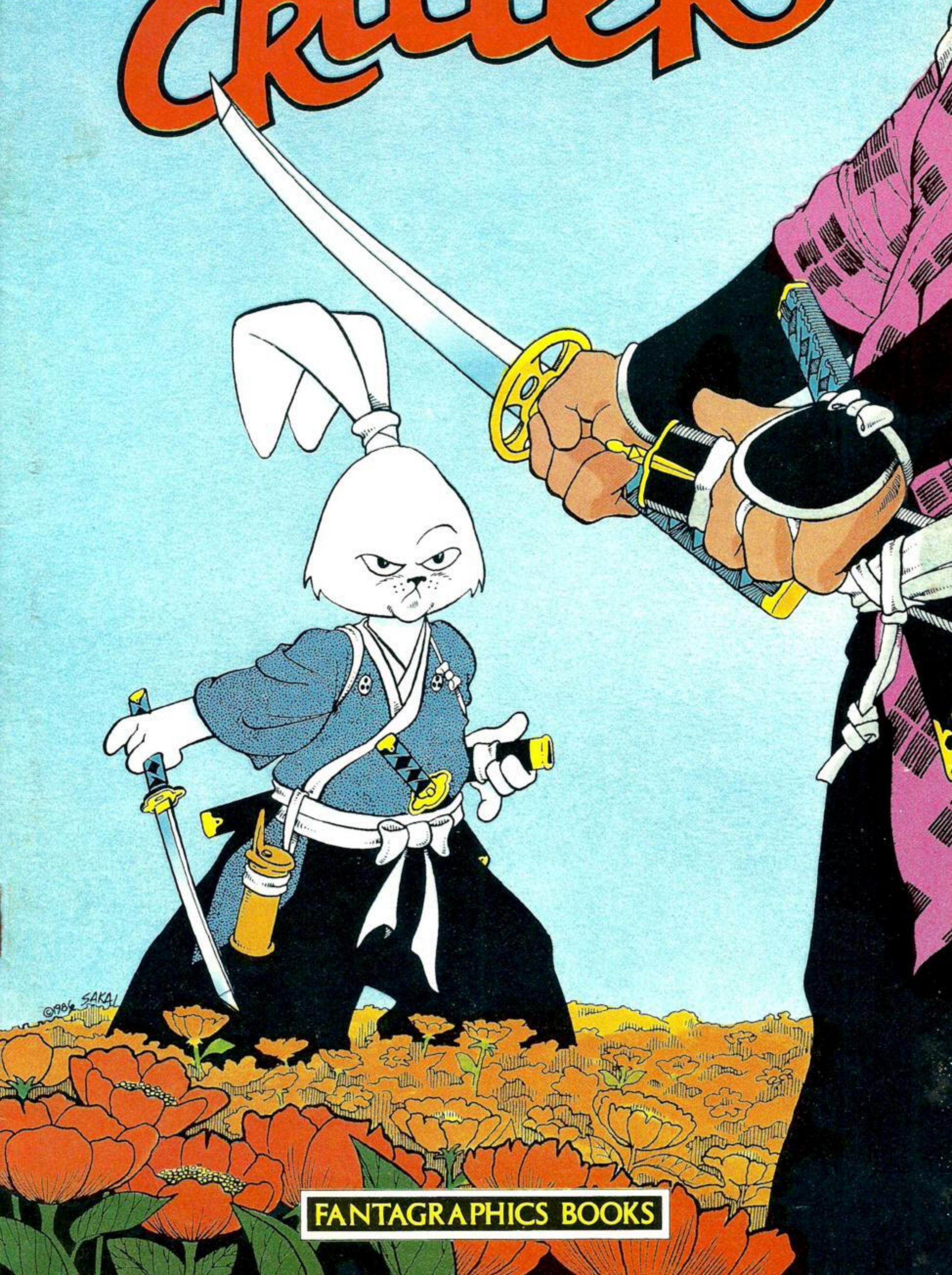


No. 3

\$2.00

(\$2.75 in
Canada)

Critters



FANTAGRAPHICS BOOKS

Critters

No. 3 Aug., 1986

THIRD TIME LUCKY

Third Issue Editorial by KIM THOMPSON

Well, it's official: **Critters** is a hit! Although we took pains to overprint the first issue by a substantial margin (it racked up the biggest print run for a black-and-white Fantagraphics Books comic ever), reorders cleaned out our warehouse within ten days of distribution—much to everyone's astonishment.

What this means for those of you joining us late, unfortunately, is that **Critters** #1 is now officially sold out (it's no longer on the subscription coupon). But since there are well over 14,000 copies out there, you should be able to scare one up for yourself before the prices start to rise. (Me, I've got a dozen copies hidden away under my bed.)

Speaking of sell-outs, a number of people have written in, asking how to get ahold of STAN SAKAI's pre-**Critters** installments of "Usagi Yojimbo," which appeared in early, now out-of-print issues of STEVEN A. GALLACCI's excellent small-press comic **Albedo**. I'm delighted to announce that this summer we'll be releasing the first **Usagi Yojimbo Summer Special**. In addition to reprinting both the **Albedo** episodes (an eight-pager and a 20-pager), it will feature a new story by Stan, a wrap-around cover by Stan colored by TOM LUTH, an introduction by MARK EVANIER, and a page drawn by SERGIO ARAGONES—thus reuniting for Fantagraphics Books the team behind Marvel's funniest comic book (no, you smart-alecks, not **Savage Tales**!).

This 48-page package will run around \$2.50 or \$2.75, and should hit the stands around the middle of July.

As if that weren't enough, June will see the release of the first Usagi Yojimbo story in full color, as a back-up to **The Doomsday Squad**, our ongoing deluxe reprinting of JOHN BYRNE and JOE GILL's classic **Doomsday**+1.

As a result of all this activity, Stan's presence in **Critters** won't be as regular as we might have hoped. Usagi will take a sabbatical until the sixth issue... although Stan will be represented with a four-page "Nilson Ground-thumper" story in **Critters** #5. After this, we hope to see Usagi or Nilson at least every other issue. We're counting on you, Stan!

Next issue, we'll be adding a couple of people to the ever-changing roster of **Critters**: KEN (Dr. Watchstop) MACKLIN, who bows in with a sensational "barbarian bunny" cover painting, and TOM (Spaced) STAZER, who introduces a set of funny-animal detective characters in a "pilot" episode to a possible series. This, plus the continuation of "Birthright" and "Gnuff"—what more could you want?

Critters #4 goes on sale in 30. I hope you'll join us... And if this is too long a wait for your funny-animal fix, have you picked up the first issue of **The Adventures of Captain Jack**? The introduction alone, by DONALD (Megaton Man) SIMPSON, is well worth the cover price! KT

CONT



Page 1 USAGI YOJIMBO "Horse Thief" by STAN SAKAI

Some days it just doesn't pay to get out of bed, as Usagi Yojimbo discovers in this comedy of errors.



Page 12 BIRTHRIGHT "Chapter Three" by STEVEN A. GALLACCI

Back on his planet of birth, Young Prince Alfon and his guardian both encounter trouble...



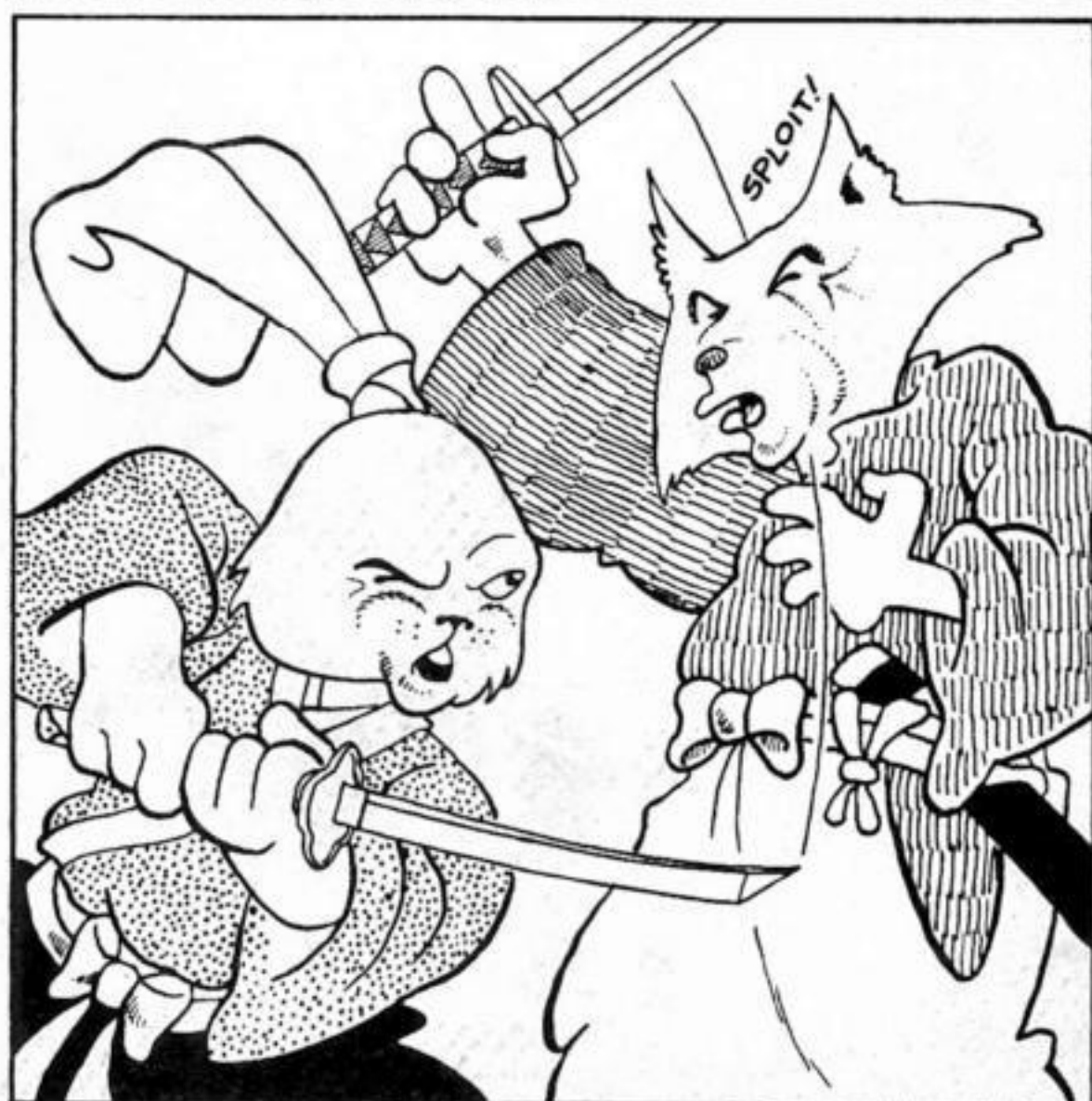
Page 22 GNUFF in: "Unhappy Returns" by FREDDY MILTON

It's Gnuff's birthday and the Gnuffs have bought her a piano. How can anything go awry on a day like this?

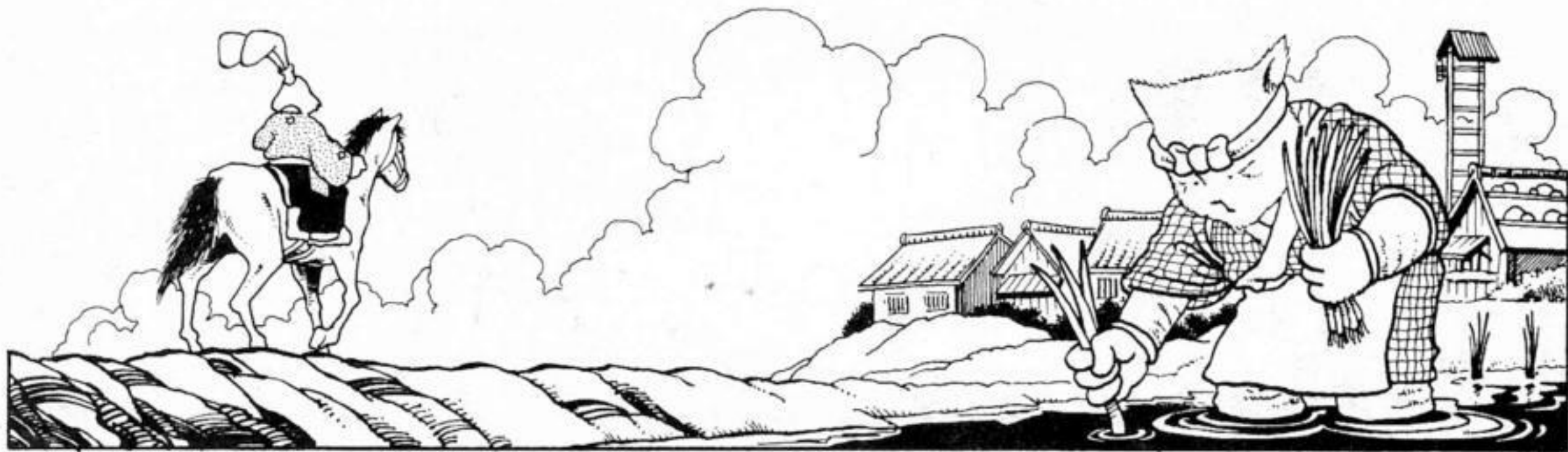


USAGI "HORSE THIEF!" YOJIMBO™

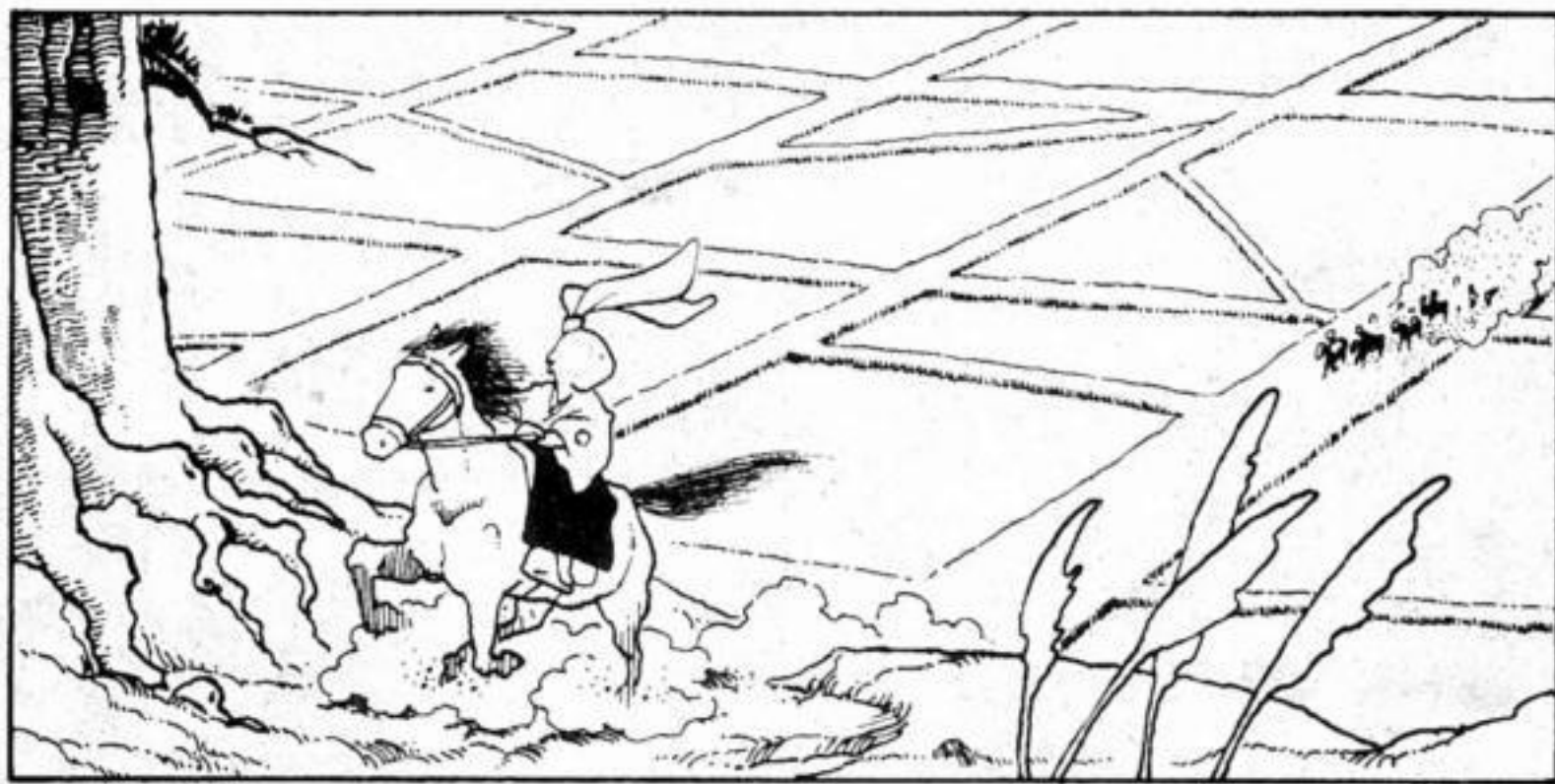






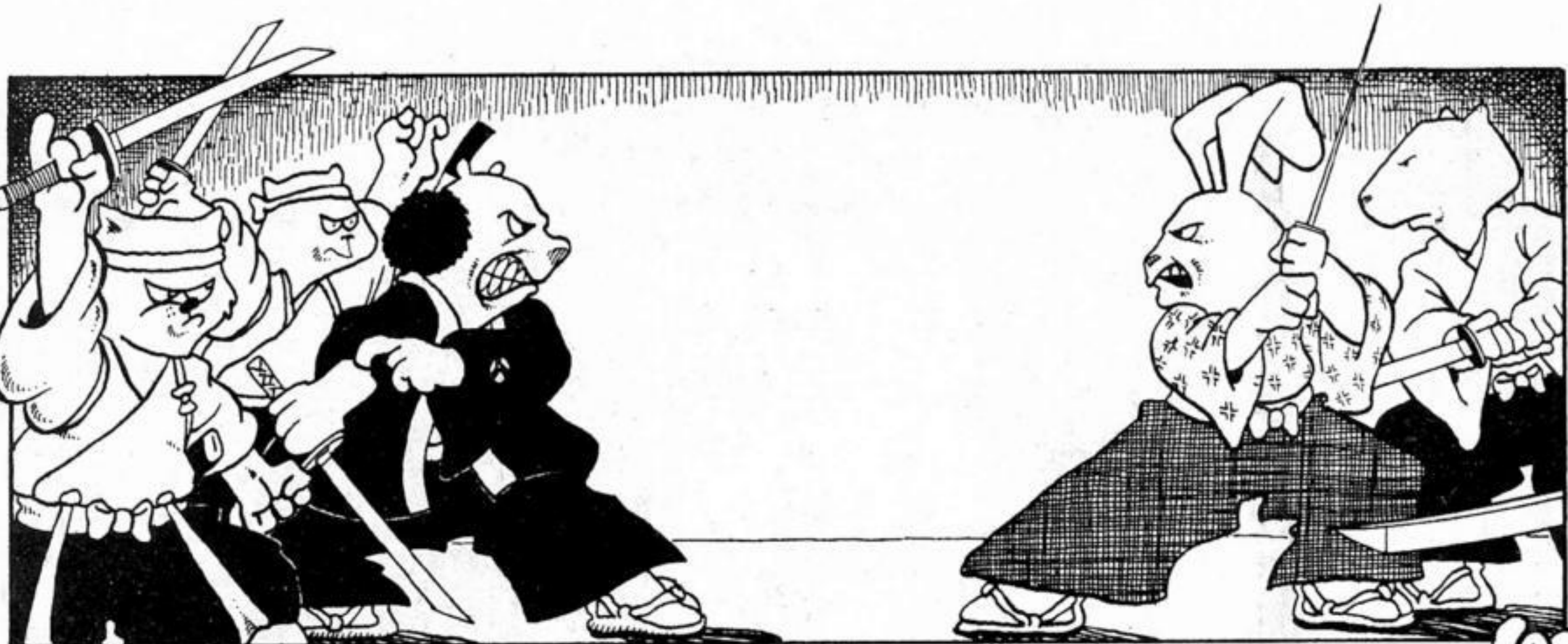












WHERE'S THE HORSE THIEF SCUM? HE LED US INTO AN AMBUSH!

I WANT HIM DEAD!

SWIPE!

VWIP!

SPLURT!

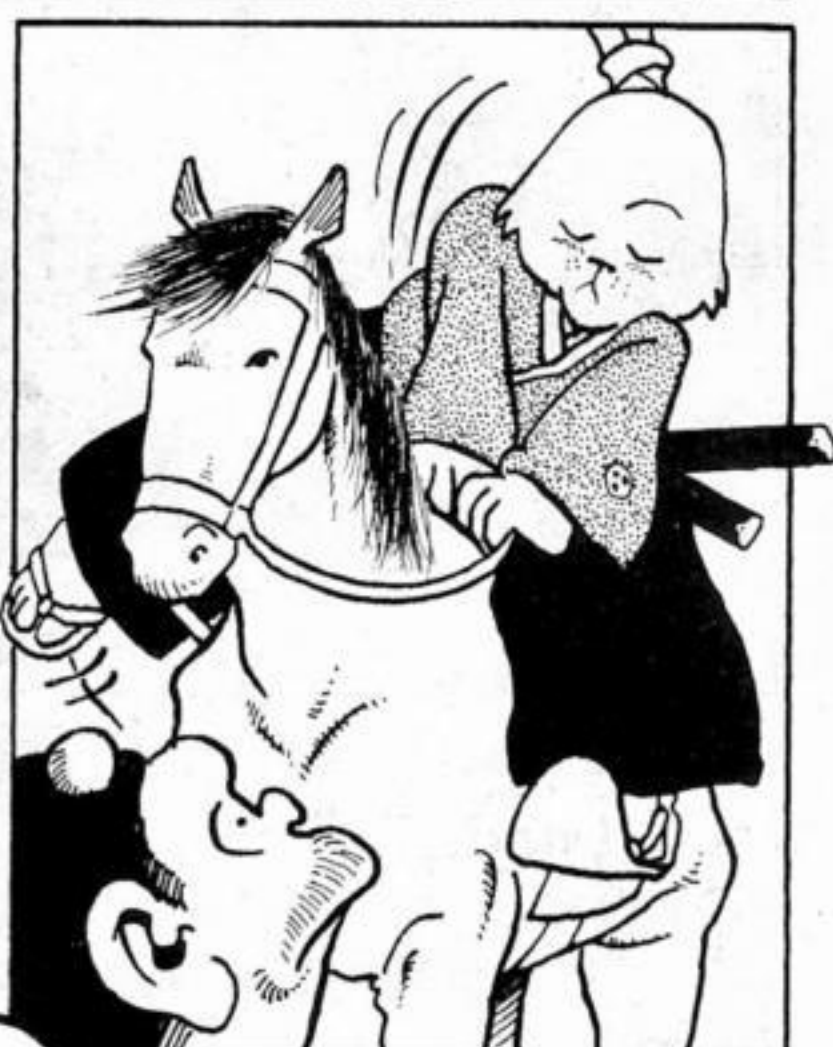
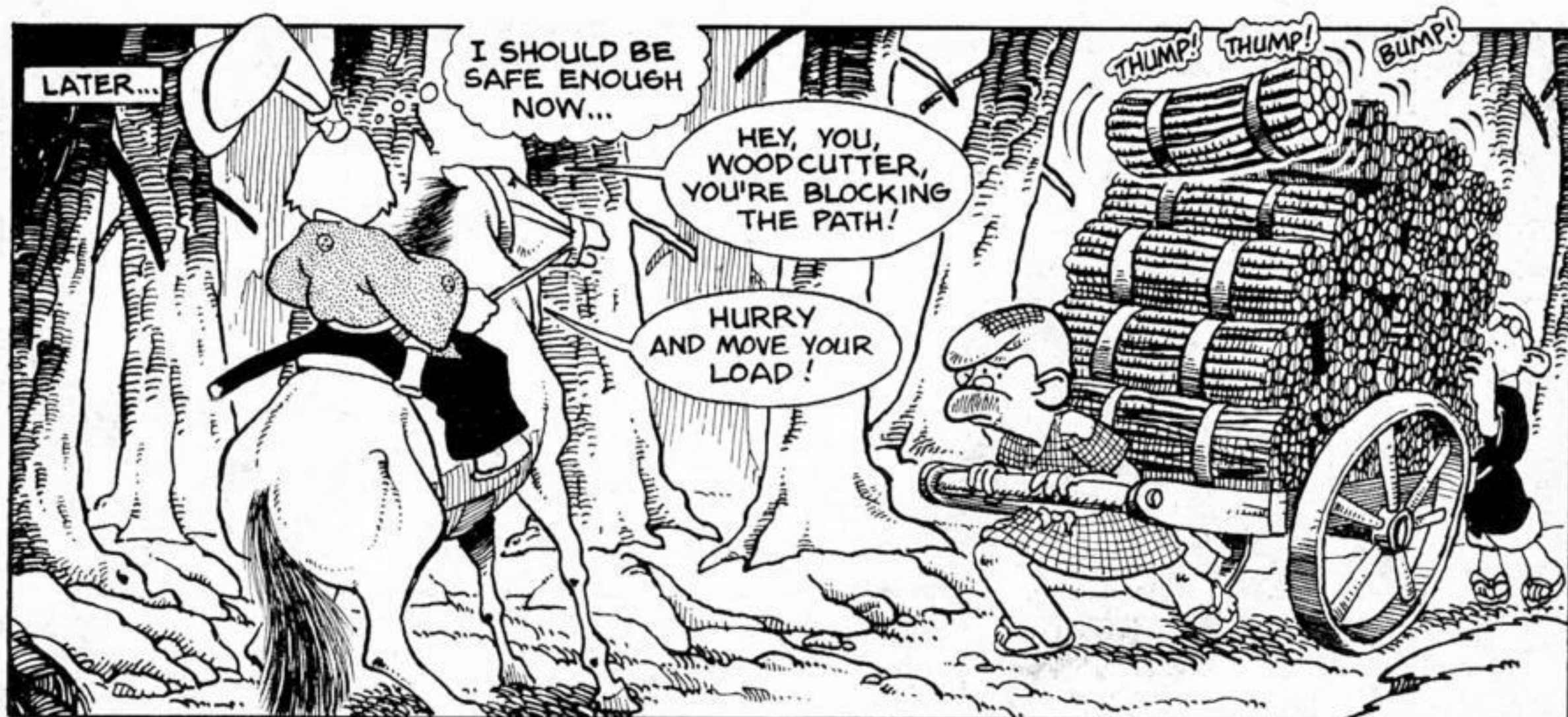
THAT RONIN MAGGOT BROUGHT THEM HERE!

SLAY HIM!

SHWIK!

GOOSH!





BROUGHT TO YOU BY

FANTAGRAPHICS BOOKS

THREAT

BIRTHRIGHT

Shartoa is occupied by Tosiu troops who secretly hold prisoner most of the old ruling family long thought dead. The eldest son, Alfon, who had escaped to neighboring Fantira, has returned after ten years, determined to help rid his homeland of foreign "peacekeepers." Major Duwan and Jenna Shodi follow him, fearing for his safety and the success of an overthrow attempt.

Relax Ms. Shodi. Once past the checkpoint we'll be fine.

Is so many soldiers.



Yes, there seems to be no end of them.

And not all are Tosiu.



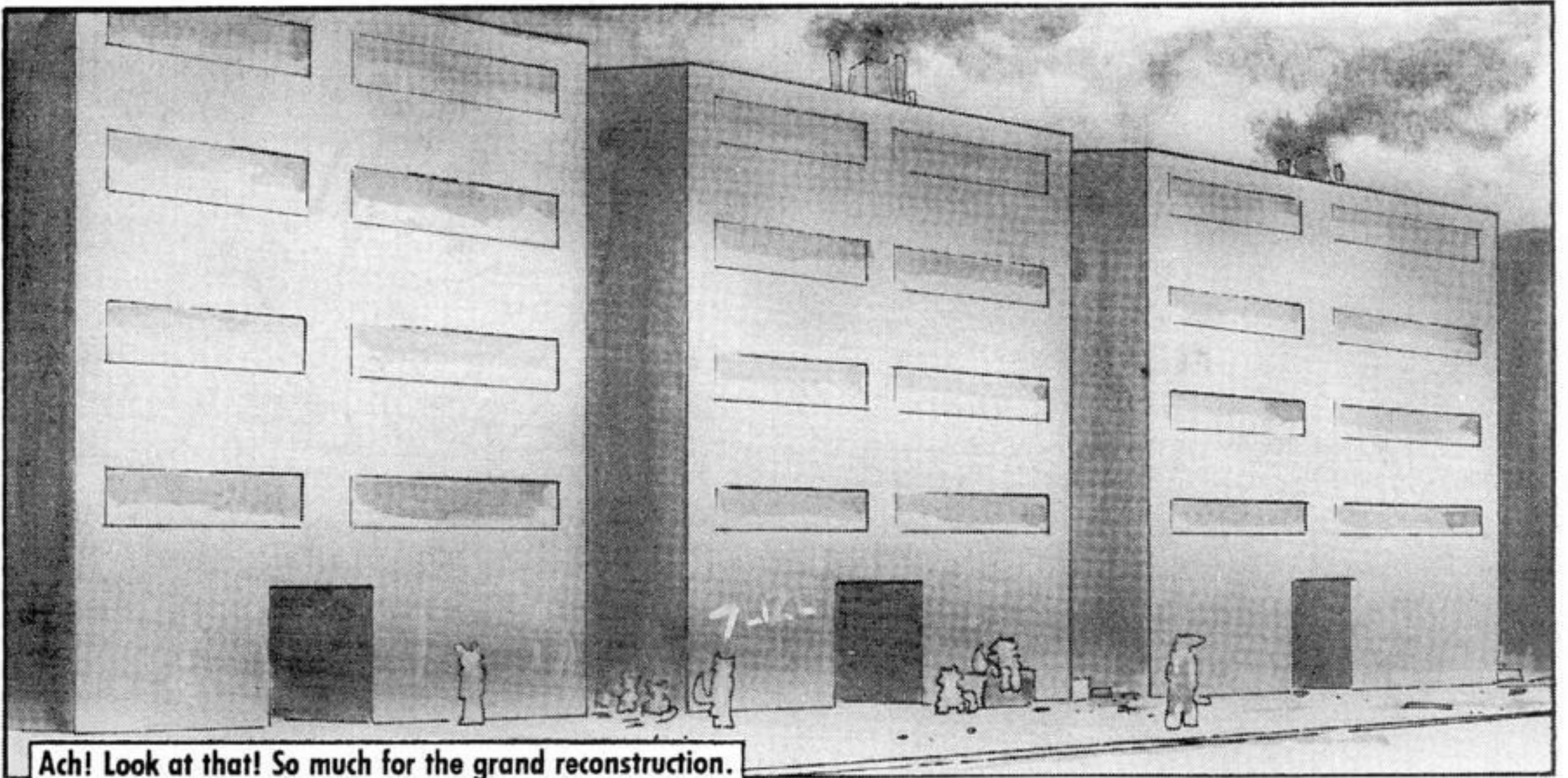
Yer Beesnees?



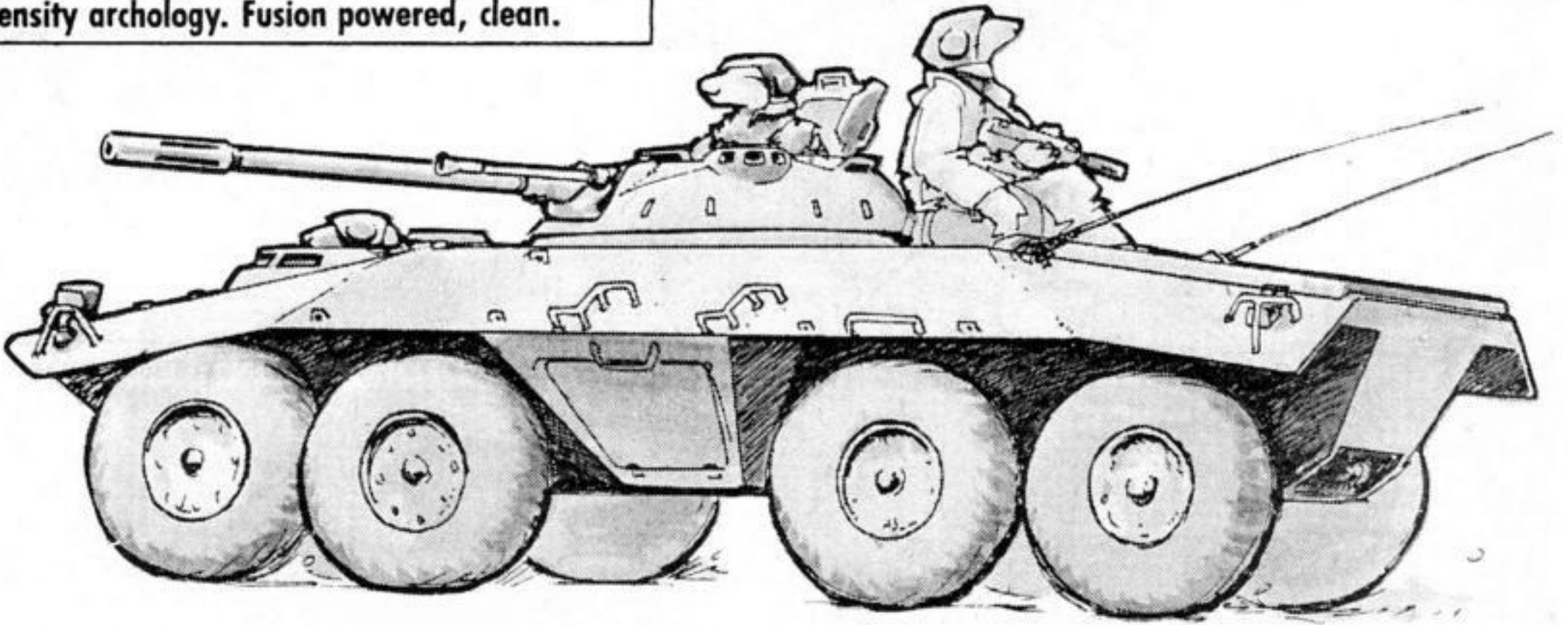
Visiting relatives in the Eoto district.



3-1 P.20



Ach! Look at that! So much for the grand reconstruction.
Coal fired tenement blocks. This all used to be a low
density archology. Fusion powered, clean.





There's some people here we must meet.



Oh Ho! Major!

Wando! I hoped to find you here.

Wando, Ms. Jenna Shodi.



Ooh, she's ta one!

And Ms. Shodi, Wando, former welfare minister, now greengrocer.



He'll be looking after you for a little while.

I've got to look up a few other people.

Ta tads'll wanta meet ya. Come! Come!



3-3 P. 22



Looking for me?

!

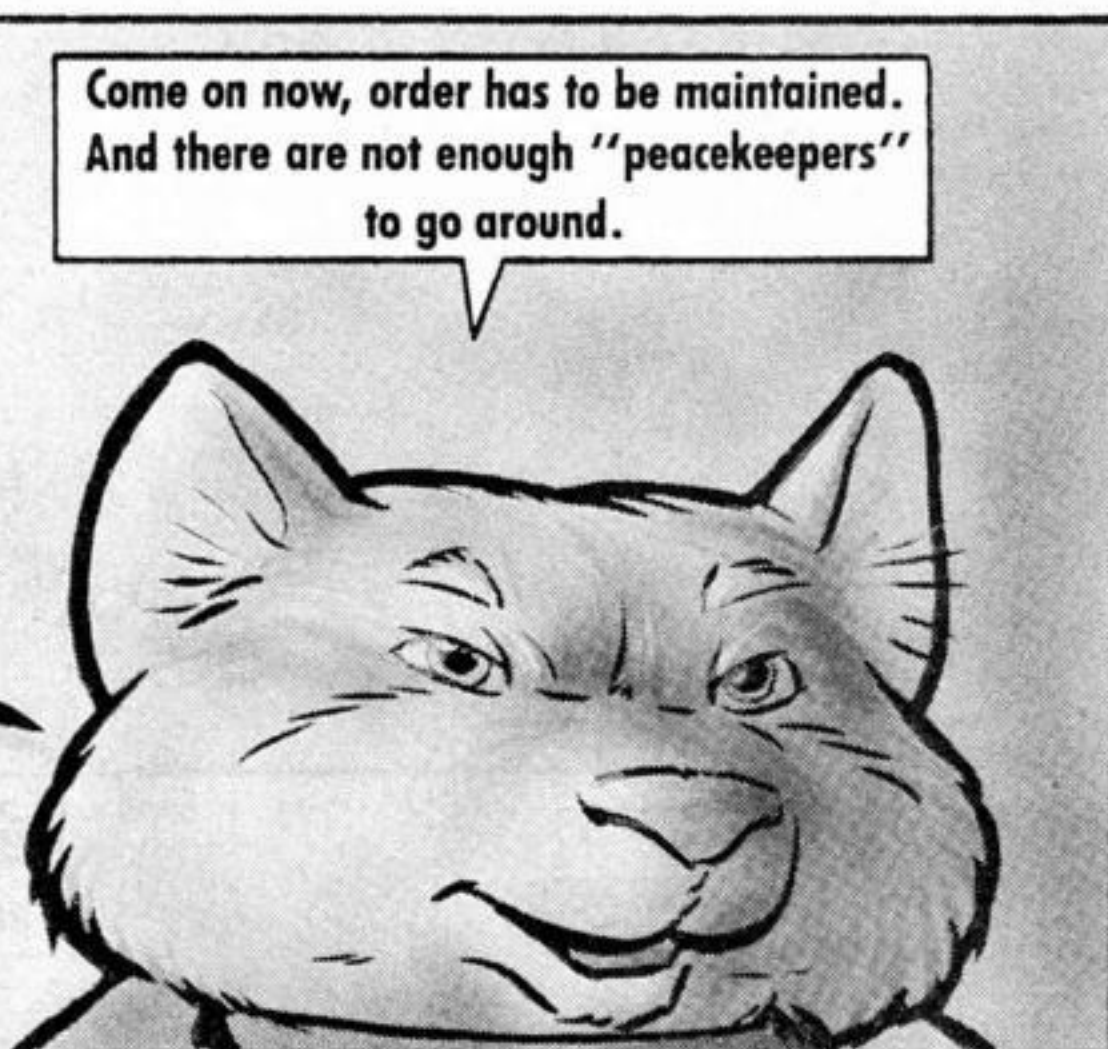


So what do you want?

Major Duwan. I recognize you from the old days.
Senti Pass. What brings you back to Shartoa?



Oh, come to pay my respects.
How is it that Shartoa uniforms stand next to Tosiu?



Come on now, order has to be maintained.
And there are not enough "peacekeepers"
to go around.

And we're quite comfortable with things as they now are.



Ah, as augmentees to an abusive occupational force?

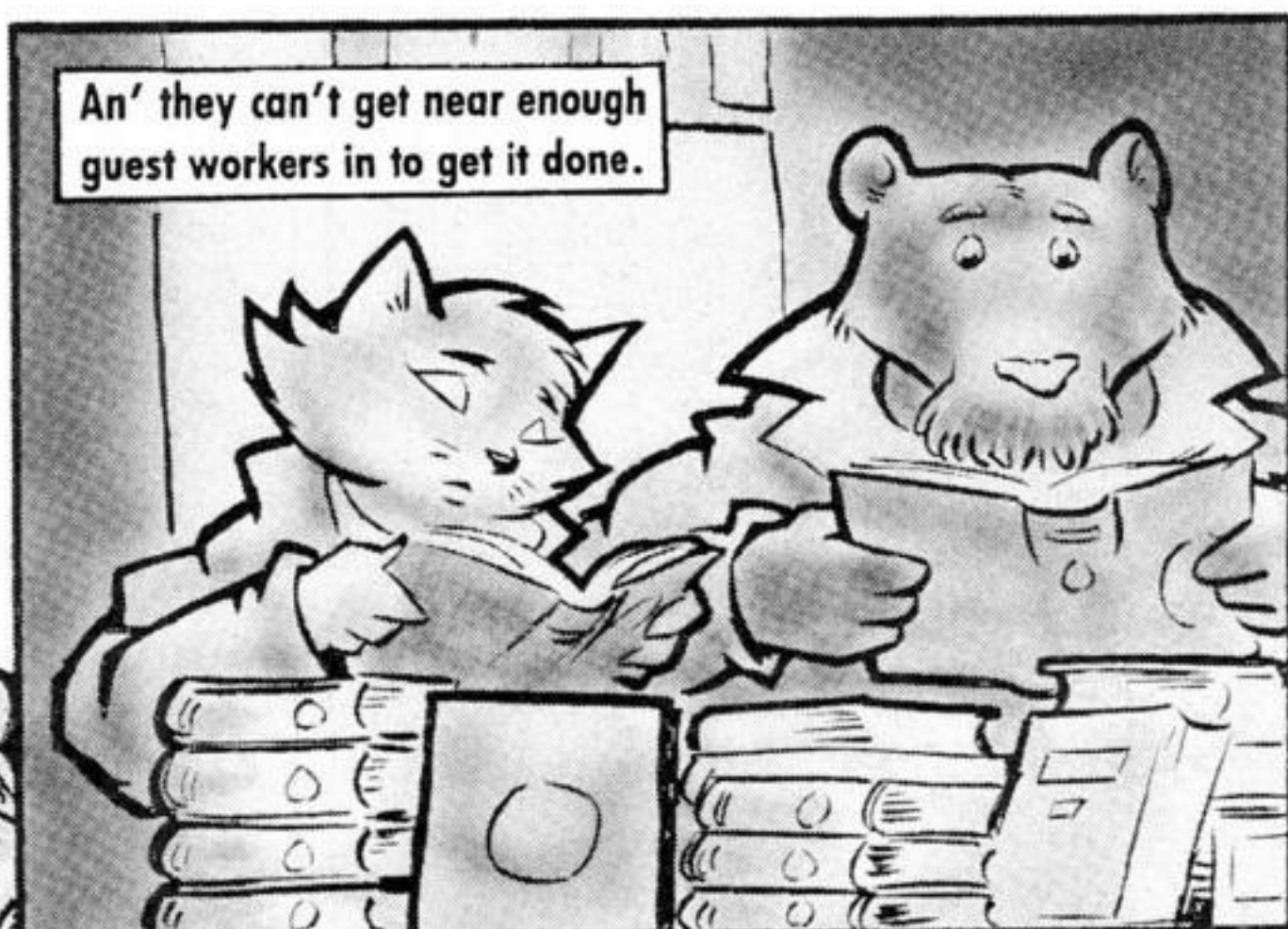


3-4 P.23

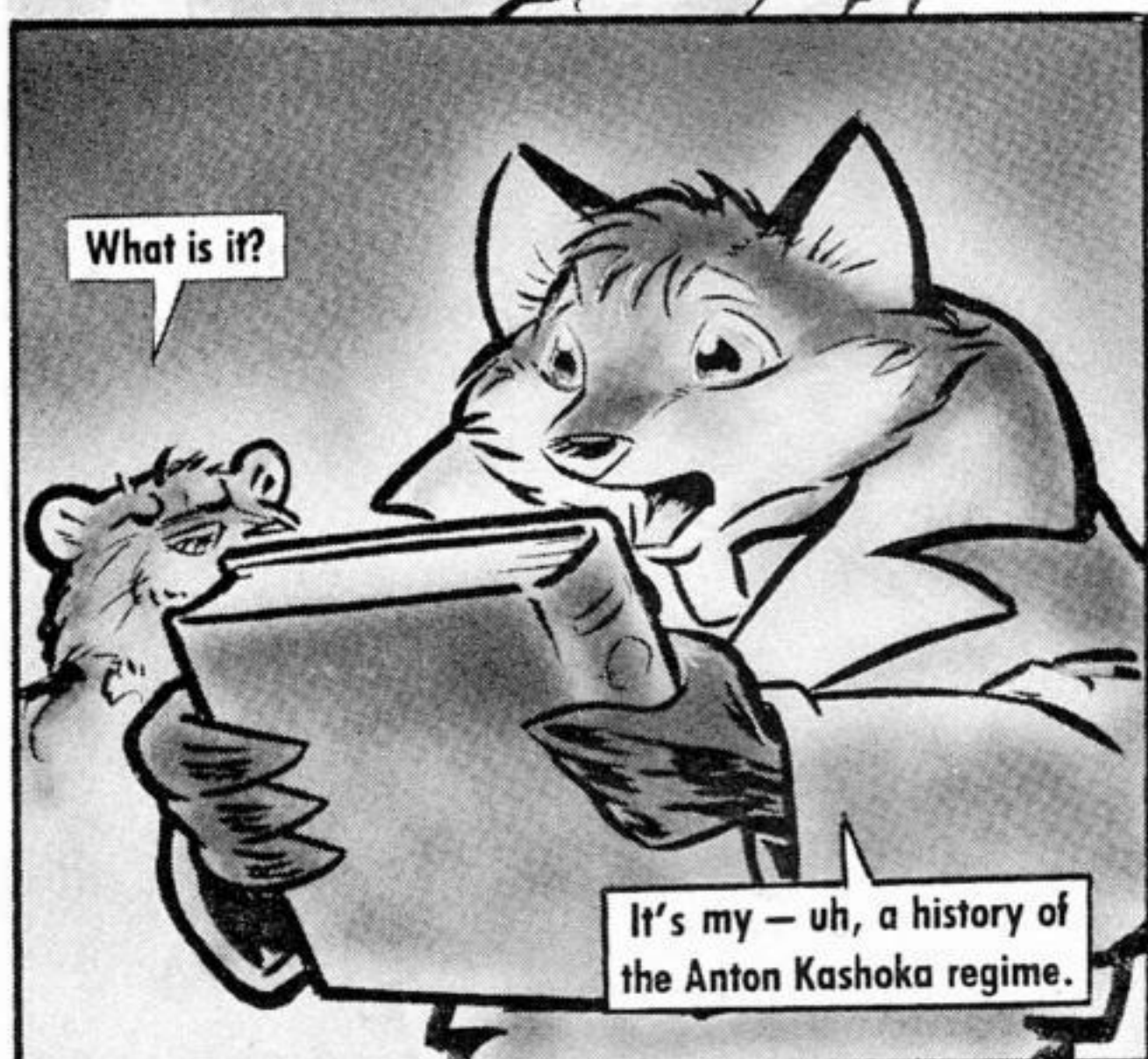




I only got this 'cause they're behind on that new project.



An' they can't get near enough guest workers in to get it done.



What is it?

It's my — uh, a history of the Anton Kashoka regime.



Didn't know yer interested in our past.

Uh — yeah.



— An' that's how we got ta be here.

In ah manner ah speakin'.

3-6 P.25



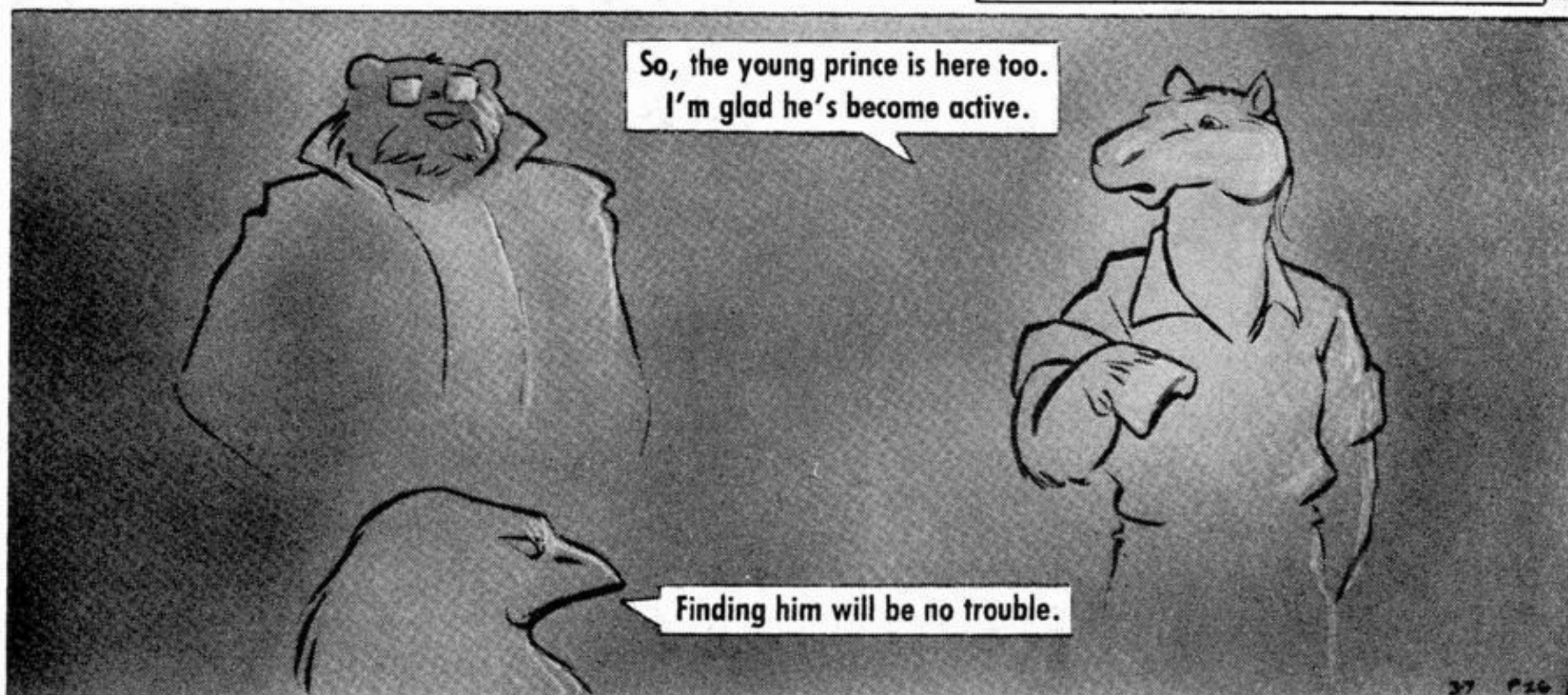
Honest ta tell ya, Ms. Jenna,
ah was a bit skeptical to hear
ya was comin'.



But now that ah've met ya — uhhh — ya got spirit,
like the princess — may her bones rest well.

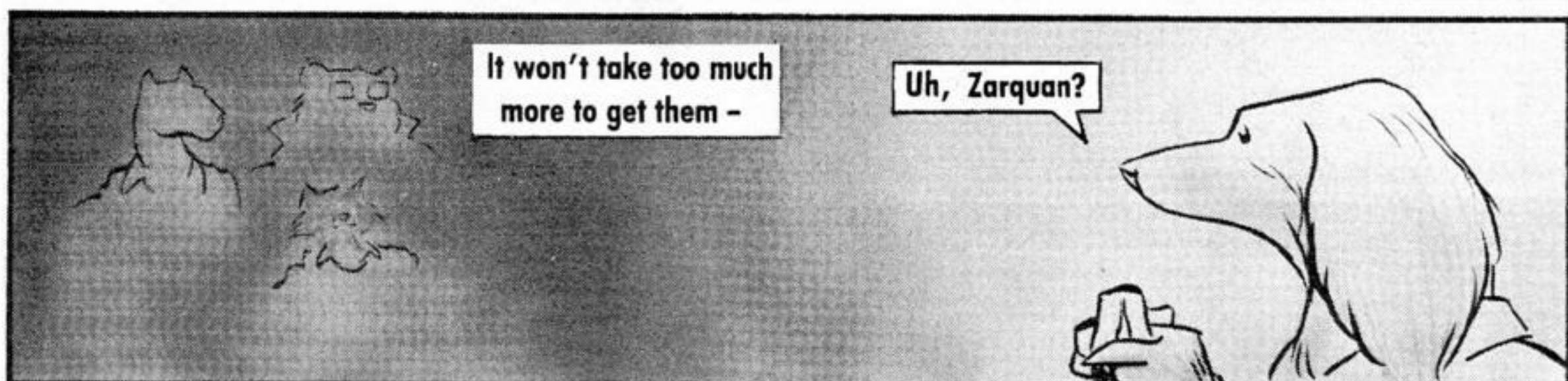
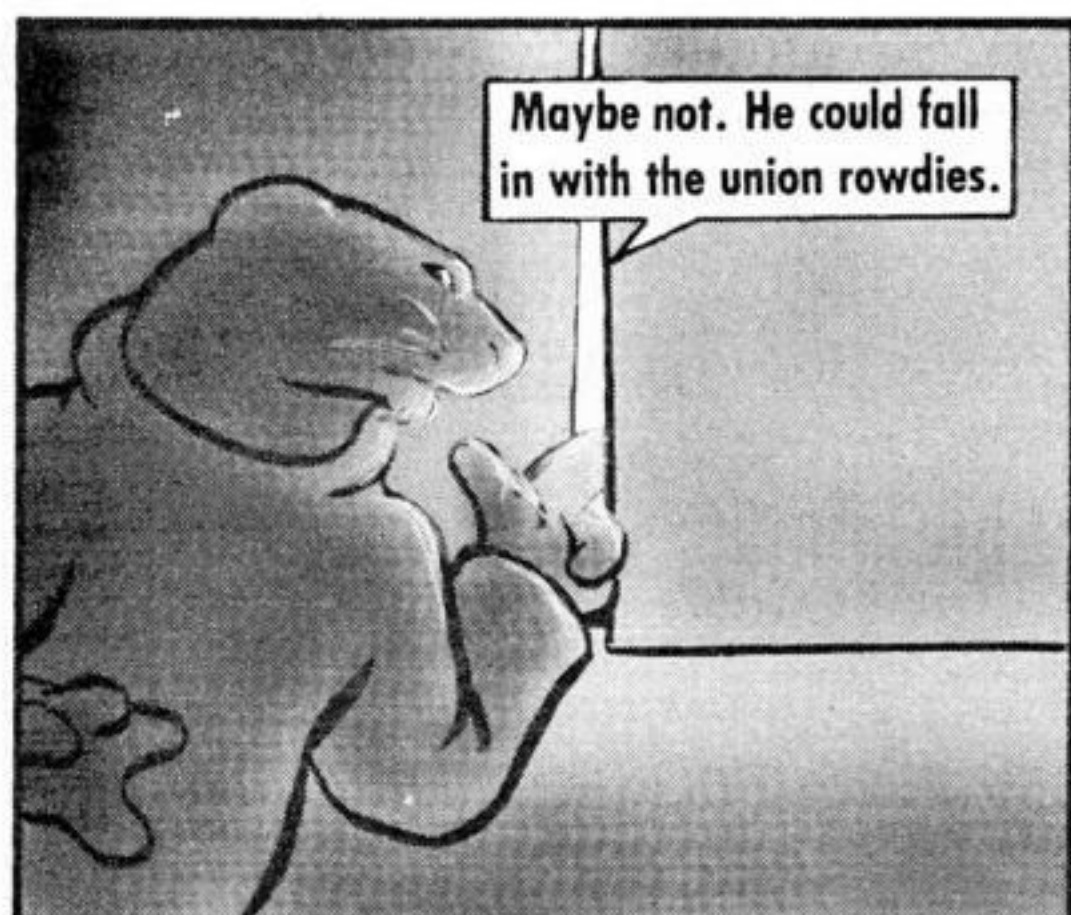


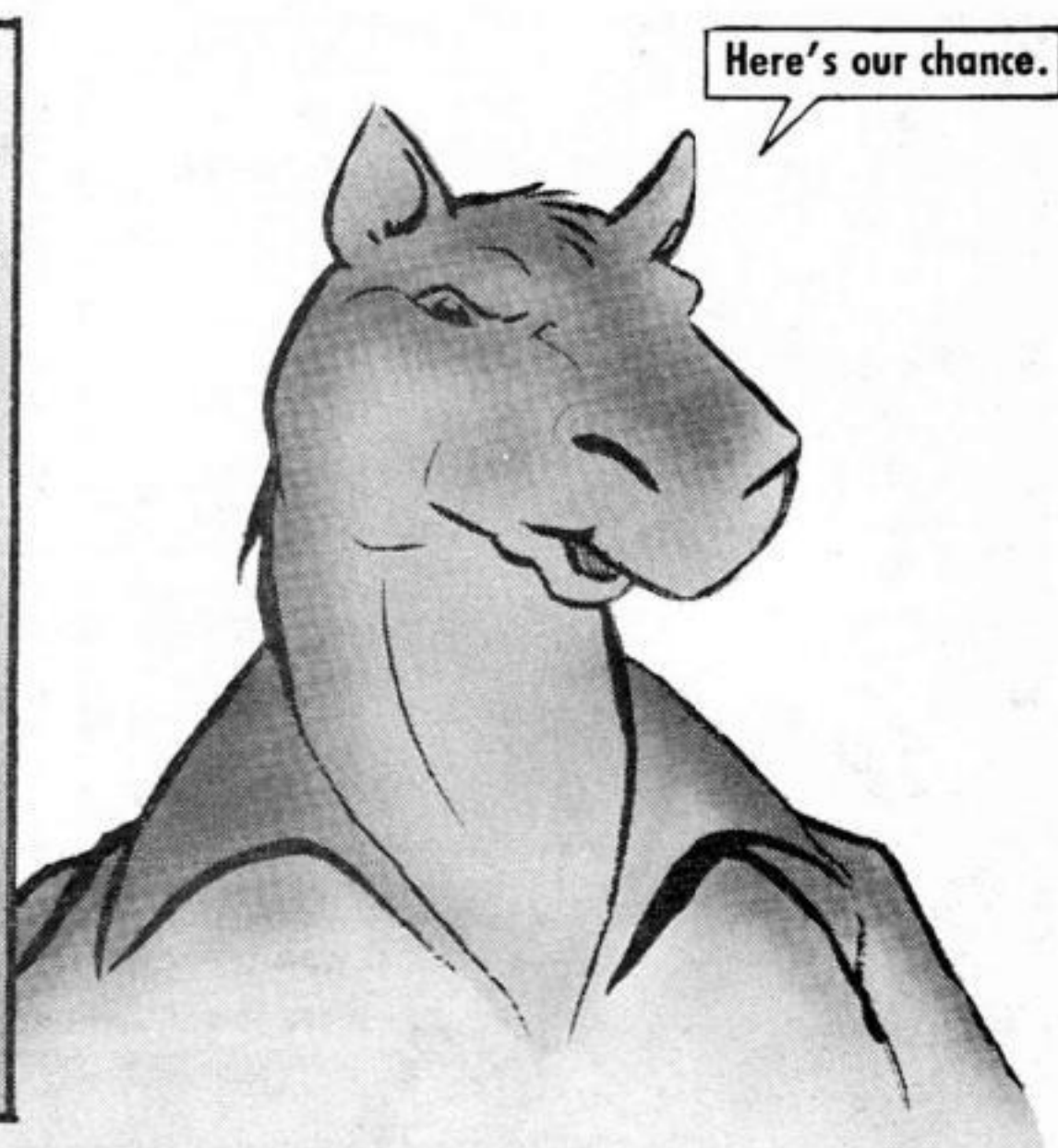
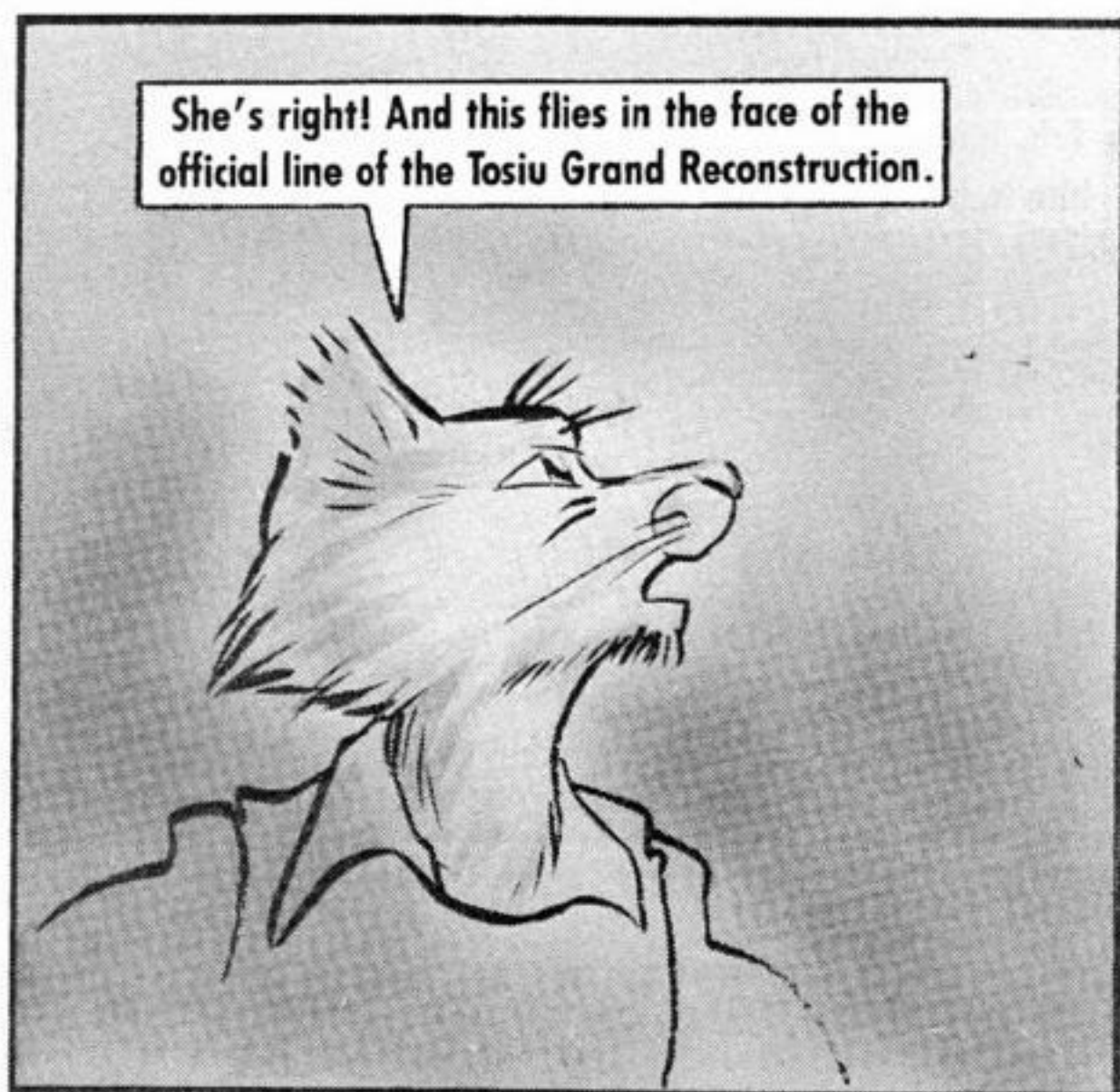
So, ah figure ya'll need ta know ah bit
about the hardware before the party starts.



So, the young prince is here too.
I'm glad he's become active.

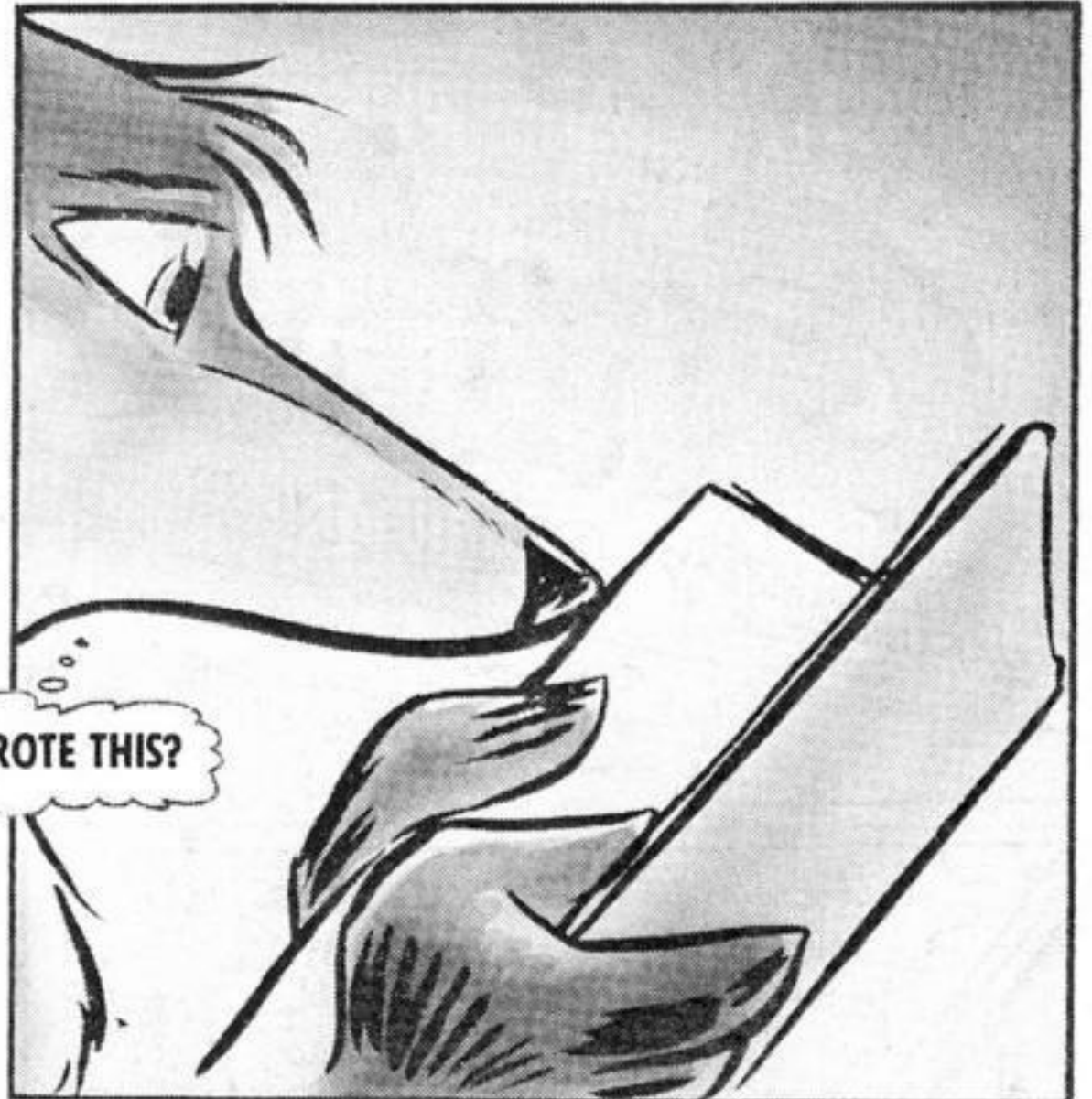
Finding him will be no trouble.







WHO WROTE THIS?

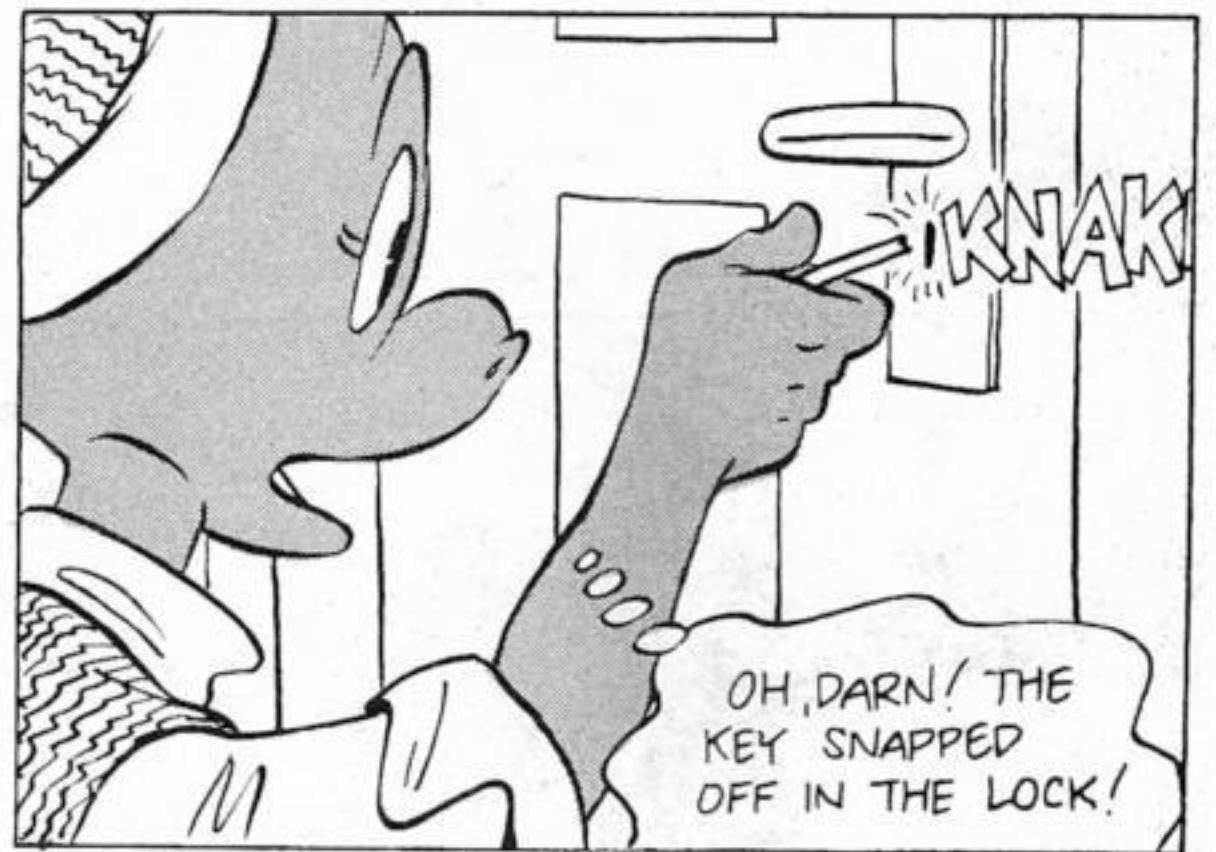


3-10 P 23

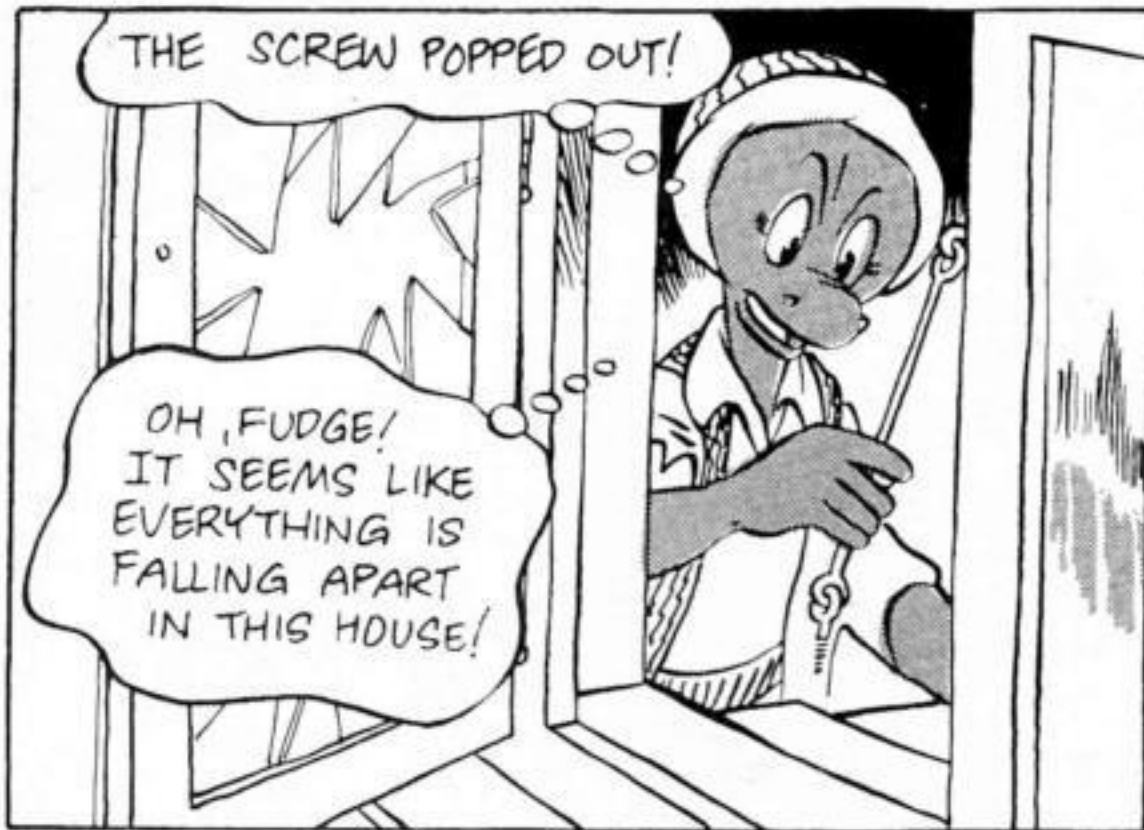
Freddy Milton's Gnuff

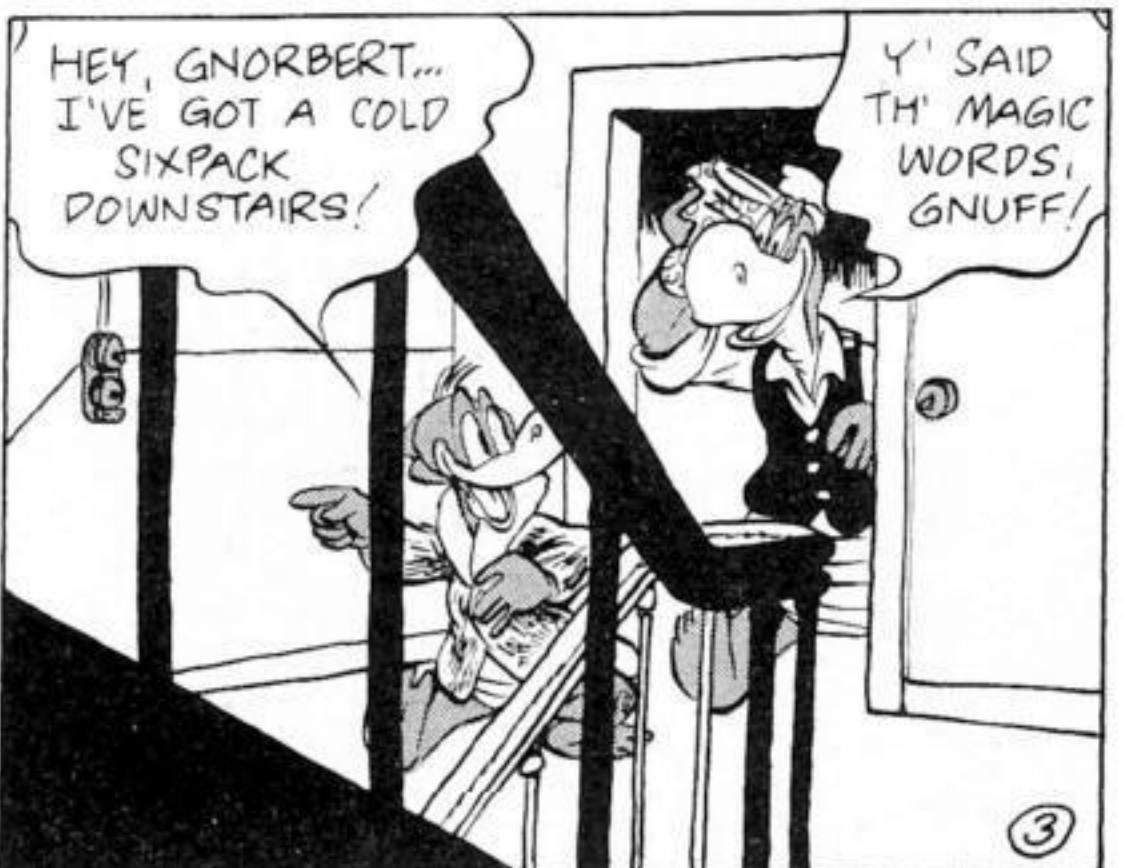
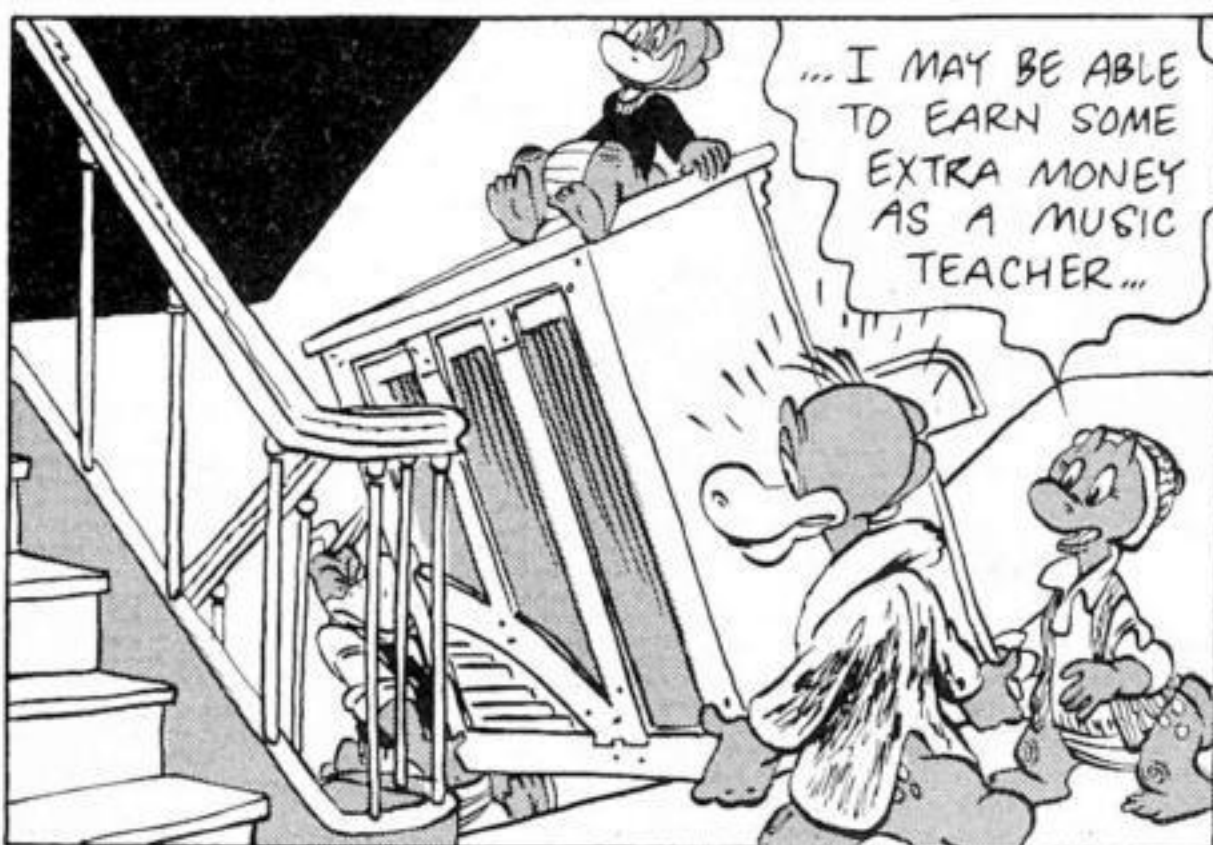
"UNHAPPY RETURNS"

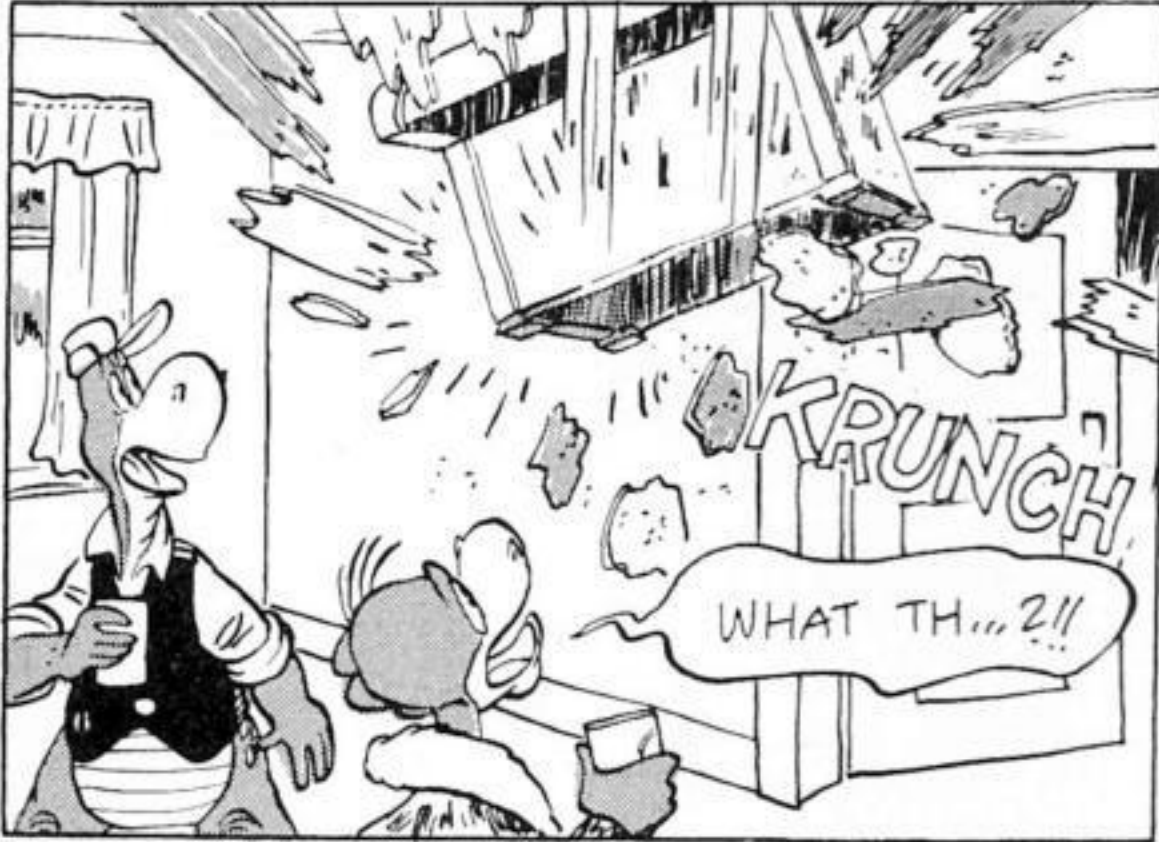
THE GNUFFS HAVE MOVED
INTO THEIR NEW HOME
ON 13 GEORGE ST.



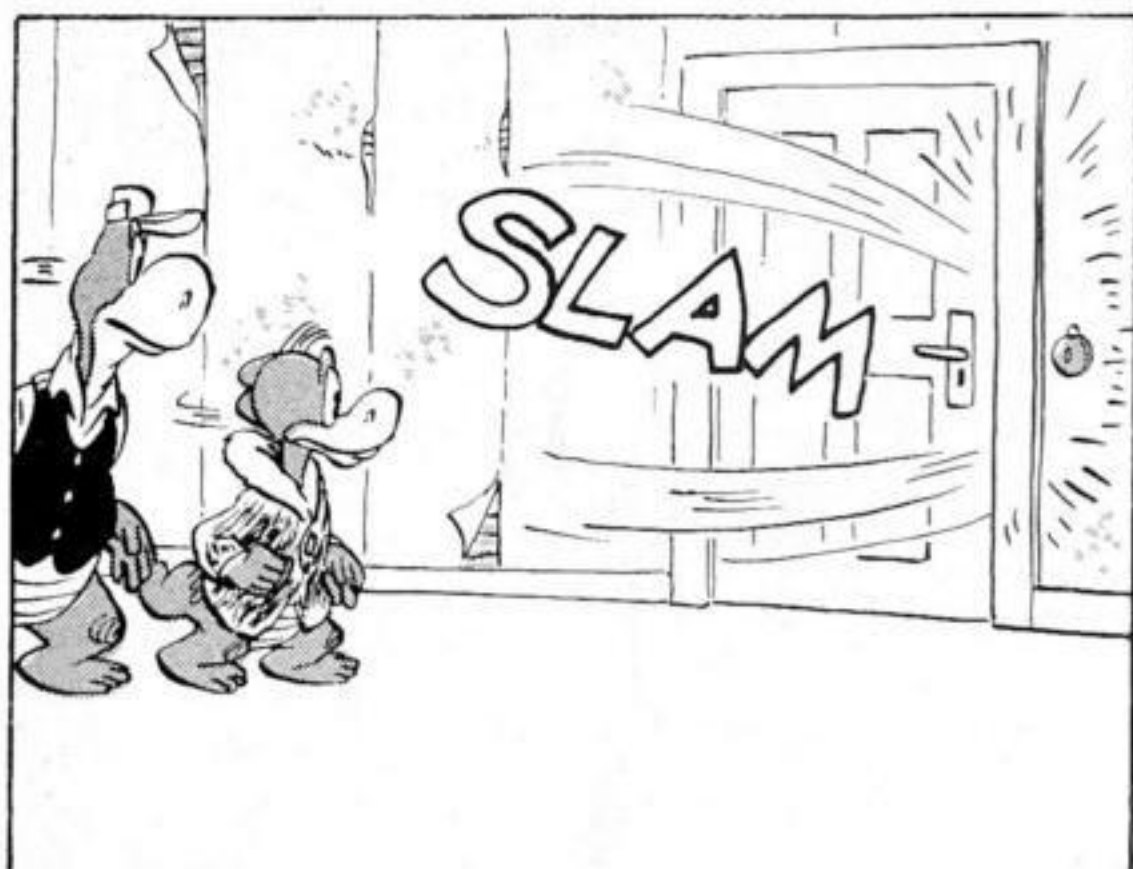
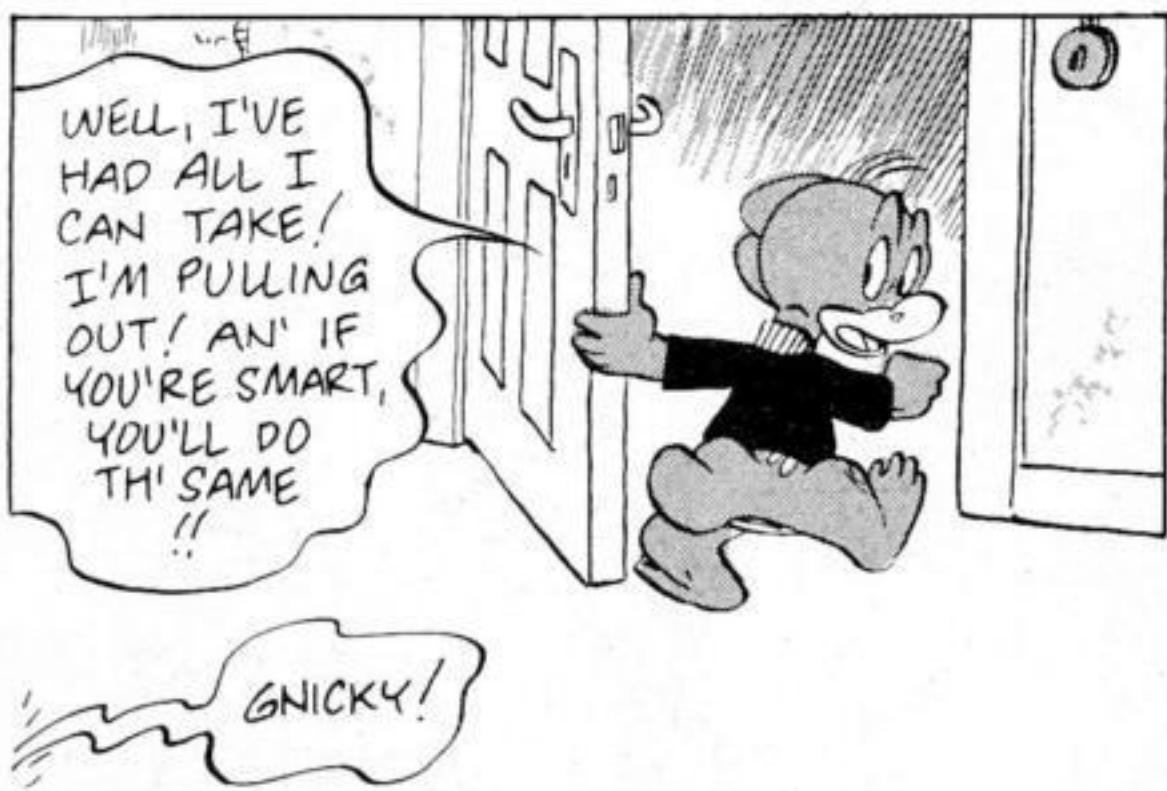
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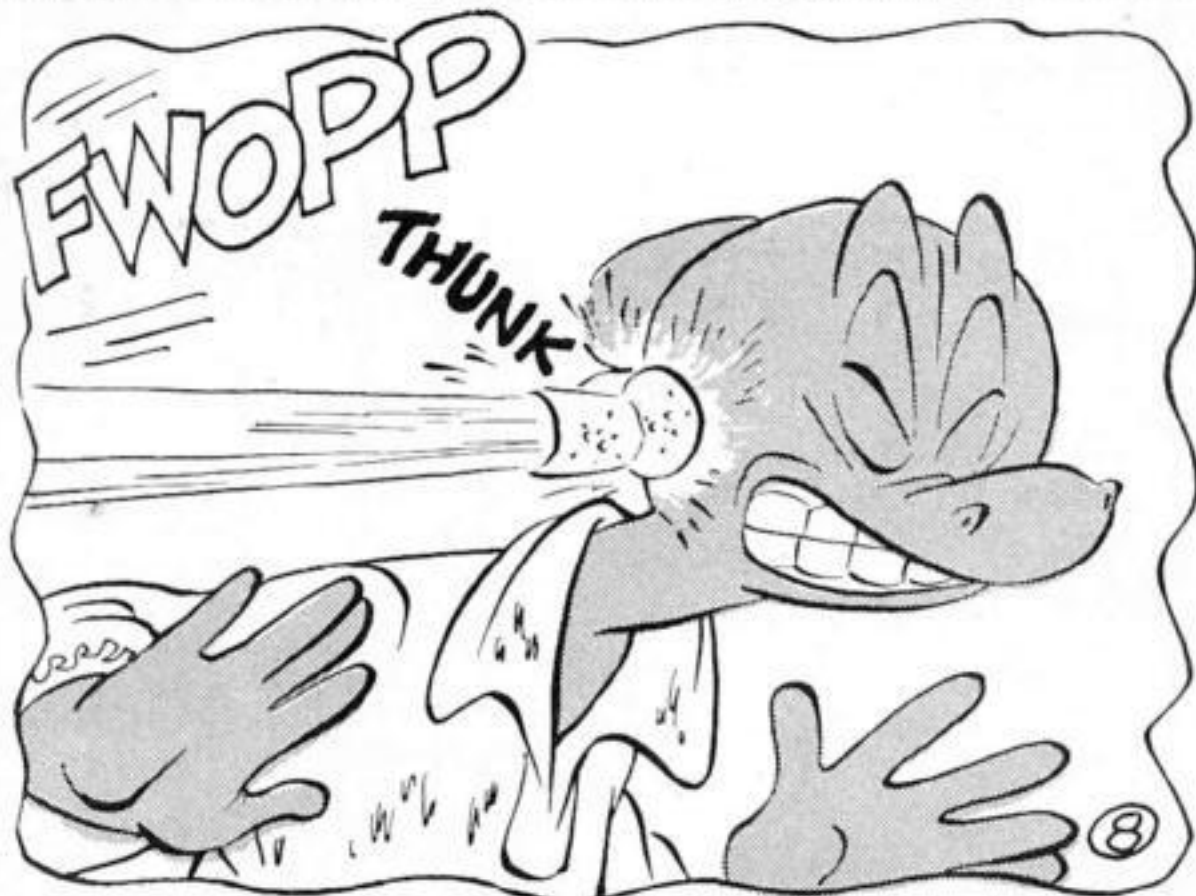
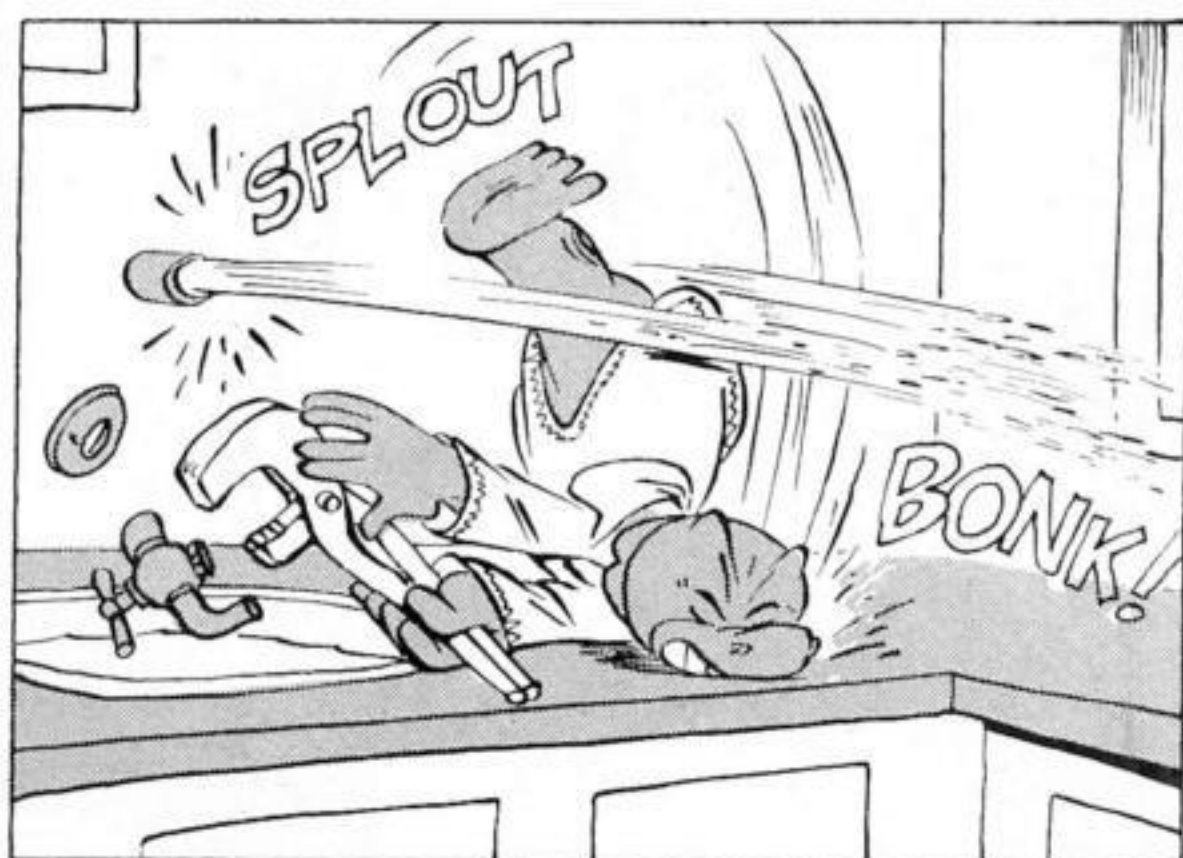
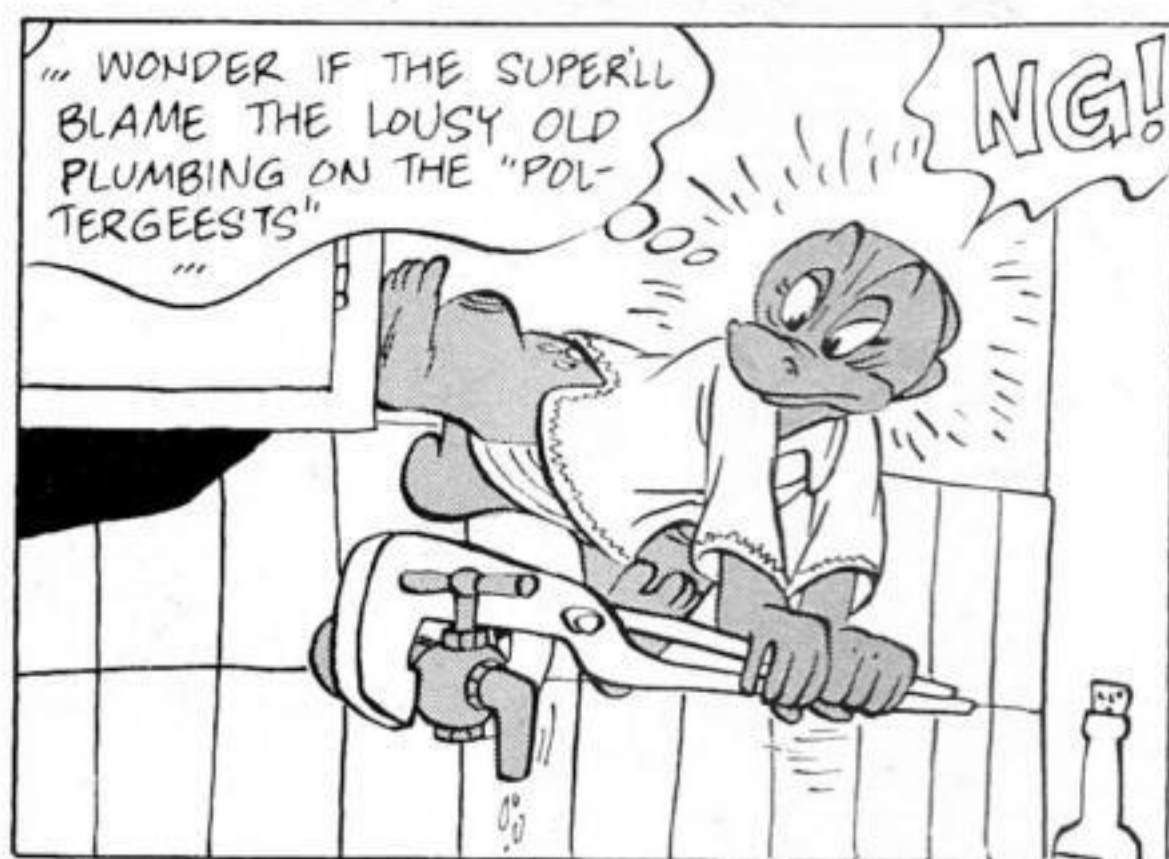


















LETTERS

Send all letters to: **CRITTERS**, Letters Dept., 4359 Cornell Road



Boy, oh boy! My very first comic-book letters column! Since **CRITTERS** #1 has only been out for a week or so, we've only received four letters, but next issue, I expect a deluge. Thanks to the four who wrote so far, and thanks to the ones that **WILL** write between the time I write this and it sees print, and special thanks to those who write **AFTER** seeing this in print!

I think that covers just about everybody. Let's dip into the mailbag! —KT

Dear Kim Thompson,

I own all five **Cutey Bunny** comics. I've also been buying **Albedo** since I first saw it with issue number three (doesn't **anyone** out there have issues number one and two to sell or trade?), so I'm familiar with the characters in **Critters** #1.

I suspect this will change with future issues, and I'm looking forward to being introduced to new characters in the pages of **Critters** who can give me as much reading pleasure as the ones I'm familiar with.

That's not to say this issue held no surprises. With Stan Sakai's story I've gained some insight into Miyamoto Usagi's code of behavior. I've also been introduced to the bounty hunter, a character I suspect will be back. I would not mind seeing him again.

I hope to see Usagi Yojimbo in this comic often. Sakai's layout, design and detail are excellent, and all of those special touches, like animal skull word balloons and curious lizards, make it really fun reading.

Cutey Bunny also surprised me by striking an unusually somber pose for that character, and though I enjoyed the story I hope no one will be forming their opinions of Cutey Bunny based on this example. **Cutey Bunny** really is a much lighter comic.

Another surprise, "Birthright," introduced me to a new facet of the "Erma Felna" storyline in **Albedo**. As usual with Steve Gallacci, I'm left wondering what is going on. But the fault lies with me. I've gotten so used to having story plots explained to me as if I were subsentient that I've begun to expect to be spoon fed this information.

Gallacci's work is clear, but not obvious. In the end I'm left with a lot of questions, and, as a result, I find myself, hours later, still thinking about this comic — and wishing the next one was out already.

You must be crazy to take on all the work there has to be to coordinate a showcase like this. It must be a labor of love, and it shows on

every page. Keep up the good work.

— John DiGiorgio
Hibernia, NJ

You hit the nail right on the head with that last comment, John. It's a lot of work doing a comic like **CRITTERS** (especially now that I'm **TRANSLATING** part of the darn thing in addition to everything else!), but I think it's worth every minute of it and I'm having a ball.

As for getting early issues of **ALBEDO**, check out this issue's editorial. Also, Steve Gallacci tells me he'll be reprinting his own work from those issues in some other format shortly. —KT

Dear Kim,

Critters was a delight to the mind and eye: I bought two copies. I'm very sorry to learn that Joshua Quagmire will be leaving the enterprise; I may not be the biggest Quagmire fan in the cosmos, but I'm one of the more dogged.

Quagmire's story, "The Day After Forever," wasn't funny. You might get complaints about that. There's a kind of un-joke they teach in psychology classes. It starts out sounding just like a real joke: "I know this guy, see, who broke his leg skiing, see, and then..." And then: his dog bites him, he loses an eye to cancer, he can't keep his job... And then. Sooner or later, the audience, expecting a funny joke, will begin to lose their foolish grins, and finally someone will ask, "Yeah, but what's the punchline?" And the joke-teller, with grave concern on his face, says, "Punchline? No, no: This really happened to a man. Why do you think it ought to be funny?" **Reader's Digest** ran a "joke" of the same nature: a tremendously rich and fat tycoon has gathered together in his rich mansion all of the indigent men he has ruined in business, to gloat over their failures. He appears at the top of the stairs. The poor men below him glare up at him in hatred. The tycoon slips on the top step, falls flat on his overstuffed arse, and tumbles down the stairs. He flops all the way down the staircase, turns the corner at the landing, and collapses onto the ballroom floor — dead. The "punchline" to this is that if you can tell at which step on the stairs the story stopped being funny, then you know what humor truly is.

Quagmire warned us: Infinity is the itch you can't scratch. And then he sets us up, and he knocks us

down. Hell yes, it hurts! Domino is lovable; lives there a fan with a heart so cold as to be able to resist her charm? The "tomboy" dress, the funky helmet, and the puppy (Poul Anderson insists that it is a school-girl and her kitten that bombs were made to incinerate) all give her a kind of self-reliant strength that is still utterly futile in the glow of a nuclear sunrise. Domino, even "knowing" what's going to happen, manages to find a moment of peace and joy with that most anachronistic of jolly things: a comic book.

Bless you, Joshua Quagmire: you can't seem to get along with anyone, but you can write a hellishly good story.

Stan Sakai's Usagi Yojimbo is of course familiar to those of us who are addicted to Steve Gallacci's **Albedo** (I bought two copies of the latest issue of it today also...) and really is something that invites little in the way of comment. Good art, cute lizards, open and shut enjoyment. As a man without honor, I find the entire Samurai ethic artificial, constrained, and obscure. (Did I leave out opaque?) Why the hell such people should place such weight upon duty and honor is simply beyond me. ("Honor" is little more than an elaborate code of placing oneself at ritual disadvantage in relation to your enemy, i.e., allowing the other army to cross the river before your army attacks it. Who needs it?) Thus, it was good to see a Usagi Yojimbo story that involves a bit of **dishonor** for once: even high and noble samurai aren't above a rotten joke on one another.

And Honor? Steve Gallacci's "Birthright" shows people with a different idea of honor that the hidebound obedience to external codes: Prince Anton and Princess Kenda aren't the Idi Amin or Ferdinand Marcos type of tyrants who will always be on the first safe plane out of their burning capital city. Their honor is internal: it was engraved into them by their parents, just as their actions have etched the same kind of honor into young Prince Alfon. The child has no choice but to grow up driven by the same kind of honor. And Theok? Why does he need to slay Anton and Kenda? Because he, too, has honor: what good would it be to have them revived by medical help, then subjected to an elaborate show-trial? What good to toss

RS

Agoura, CA 91301



them in an underground keep? Their Principate is dead: fitting that they should die with it. He toppled them: fitting that he should kill them. Simply put, I don't hold it against him. (There: didn't I say I was without honor?)

I'm astonished at such quality from **Critters #1**. I find it difficult to believe that such quality can be maintained on a monthly basis. Personally, I'd be happy seeing the comic come out less often, so long as the quality of the first issue is maintained, and considering that Sakai and Gallacci have other foes to slay, other lives to draw, I have to wonder. But I'm with you to the bitter end, and I'll be buying two copies each time.

Again, I'm most sorry to see you lose Joshua Quagmire: his wit, art, and grace — on paper at least — are just perhaps unequalled. It was with great restraint that I appended the "d's to every conjunction in this letter — in honor of Quagmire's idiosyncrasy. I ought to have spoken of honor an' humor an' morals an' death.

Until Domino is free, or until my collection of **Critters** is incinerated by a thermonuclear sunrise bigger, brighter, hotter by far than hers, I am with you in joy and in love.

Keep on truckin'.

Jefferson P. Swycaffer
San Diego, CA

As you must have gathered from the last couple of issues, Jefferson, your reading of Theok in "Birthright" was way off: Steve threw you a curve ball, didn't he?

Your concern for the quality of **CRITTERS** is appreciated, but I've set up some safeguards to prevent overwork from taking its toll on the quality of the various series. "Gnuff," of course, is pre-written and drawn for at least a dozen episodes; "Usagi Yojimbo" is scheduled to appear only every other issue or so; and as for "Birthright," well, bear in mind that in **ADDITION** to his workload here and on **ALBEDO**, Steve Gallacci is planning to work on yet another title for his own Thought & Image company, so he's just a speed demon and nothing I do will stop him anyway!

We'll be pacing these three "regulars" with the occasional contribution from other sources, like Mike Kazaleh (last issue), Tom Stazer (next issue), and some surprises.

By the way, fans of Joshua Quagmire's should know that his "Nasty Naughty Nazi Ninja Nudnik Elves" series appears in **FANTASY BOOK #18** and **19**—available for \$4.00 apiece from **FANTASY BOOK, P.O. Box 60126, Pasadena, CA 91106**. Each issue is 64 pages thick and features lots of short stories and novellas and stuff, for those of you that like a bunch of words without pictures now and again.

See you in 30!

—KT

CREDITS: "Usagi Yojimbo" was written and drawn by Stan Sakai. "Birthright" was written and drawn by **Steven A. Gallacci**, with typesetting provided by **Western Type**. "Gnuff" was written, drawn, toned, and re-lettered by **Freddy Milton**; the translation was by **Kim Thompson**. The cover was drawn by **Stan Sakai** and colored by **Tom Luth**. Separations provided by **Impact Productions**. The **CRITTERS** logo was designed by **Freddy Milton** and rendered by **Ingo Milton**. Printed at **Port Publications**. Production by: **Tom Mason**, art director, and **Dave Nelson**, production assistant. **CRITTERS** is edited by **Kim Thompson** for **FANTAGRAPHICS BOOKS**.

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