



LETTERS

Send to: CRITTERS, 4359 Cornell Road, Agoura, CA 91301

Cops

Well, for those of you who have been following my various pronouncements as to upcoming issues, we have a couple small changes in our schedule. As you can see, this issue, which was supposed to feature a Mark Armstrong "Firecracker Jack" cover/story combo, now reintroduces the "Gnuff" family—while the "Firecracker Jack" episode settles into the following issue.

When it turned out that Mark Armstrong needed a few more weeks to finish his story. I realized that I actually had enough completed material on hand for an issue, and made the snap decision to exchange most of the contents of Critiers #7 for most of the contents of Critiers #8. It all worked out fine, except:

#8. It all worked out fine, except (1) This issue may be a little late as a result.

(2) Because of the varying page counts. I was forced also to trade Sam Kieth's "Lizards" premiere for Ty Templeton's "The OI' Treasure Map Story"—this after Ty stayed up 30 hours or so working on the strip to finish it on deadline. I'm sorry. Ty—how can I make it up to you? Publish a book of yours, or something?

(3) Since the rest of this year's issues of Criters are pretty irredeemably locked into sequence. I can't present the second installment of 'Gnuff: Animal Graffiti' until #θ – so there'll be a two-month gap between episodes. Good thing this is a longish episode that can stand on its own if necessary.

Well, the Usagi Yojimbo Summer Special was published last month and sold out in just about 90 hours. So don't order any more copies—we don't got none! However. I promise that within the next 12 months, all those stories will be back in print—although not necessarily in the same format!

Also, this success has given us the final impetus we needed to get off our duffs. So I'm delighted to announce that very early next year, we'll be releasing the first issue of a regular bi-monthly Usagi Yojimbe comic – featuring 20 pages of Stan Sakai's leapin' lapin, plus some special surprises. Meanwhile, though, he'll still be putting in appearances in at least three more issues of Critters, so don't cancel your sub just yet!

By the way, Stan's story in Grimlack, which I mentioned last issue, is not a Usagi Yojimbo story—he just pops up in the background of one panel. Sorry for the confusion.

...Did I really write "leapin' lapin" back there?

I've been getting some recurring suggestions about which other people or characters I should try to draft into **Critters**. Let me address them all here:

Hugo: Although I love the strip. I don't know if Milton Knight's somewhat unique sensibilities are suited for Critters. I understand Milton's talking to another alternative publisher right now about bringing back the book itself. Hope it happens!

The Wrafts: Michael T. Gilbert

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The Wraith: Michael T. Gilber wrote me a very nice letter explaining that he's currently 'way too busy (on Elric and Mr. Monster) to even think of doing more Wraith stories for a while. My offer stands, though.

Omaha: Actually, for a couple of weeks there, it looked like Frantagraphics Books might pick up this title, lock, stock, and garter belts. As it turned out though. Denis Kitchen of Kitchen Sink Press (which published the first "Omaha" episodes) was also interested in the title, so we bowed out. I met creators Reed Waller and Kate Worley in San Diego, however, and we're seriously talking about their doing something else for Critters.

[SEE LETTERS, PAGE 32]

CRITTERS #7. January. 1987. Critters is published monthly by Fantagraphics Books. Inc.. and is copyright 1986 Tentagraphics Books. Inc. All chracters, stories, and art 1986 their respective creators. Sam Kieth. Freddy Millian. and Stan Social. No part of this magazine may be reproduced without written permission from Fantagraphics Books and the creators. except for journalistic purposes. No similarity between the any of the names. Accracters, persons, and institutions in Critters and those of any living or deed persons is intended, and any such similarity that may exist is purely coincidental. Letters to Critters become the property of the magazine and are assumed intended for publication in whole or in part, and may therefore be used for those purposes. First printing: August. 1985. Available directly from the publisher for \$2.00 + 50' postage and handling: Fantagraphics Books. 439 Cornell Road Agoura. CA \$1300.

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Page 1 GNUFF "Who Is Orva?" by FREDDY MILTON

An unknown graffiti artist is making life miserable for Gnuff—so Gnicky and Gnorbert set out to catch him.



Page 16 LIZARDS in: "De Grand Wa-Zoo" by SAM KIETH

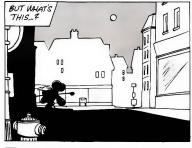
Presenting the Lizards – as they face a severe problem all of us have encountered at one time or another.



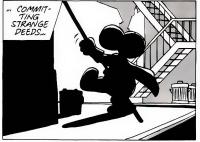
Page 21 USAGI YOJIMBO in: "Blind Swordspig" by STAN SARAI

Usagi faces the dilemma of a sightless peace-lover who keeps on getting into scrapes – and solves it his way.











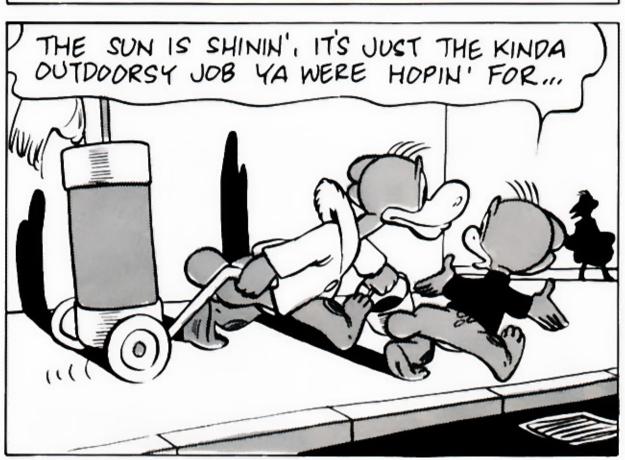




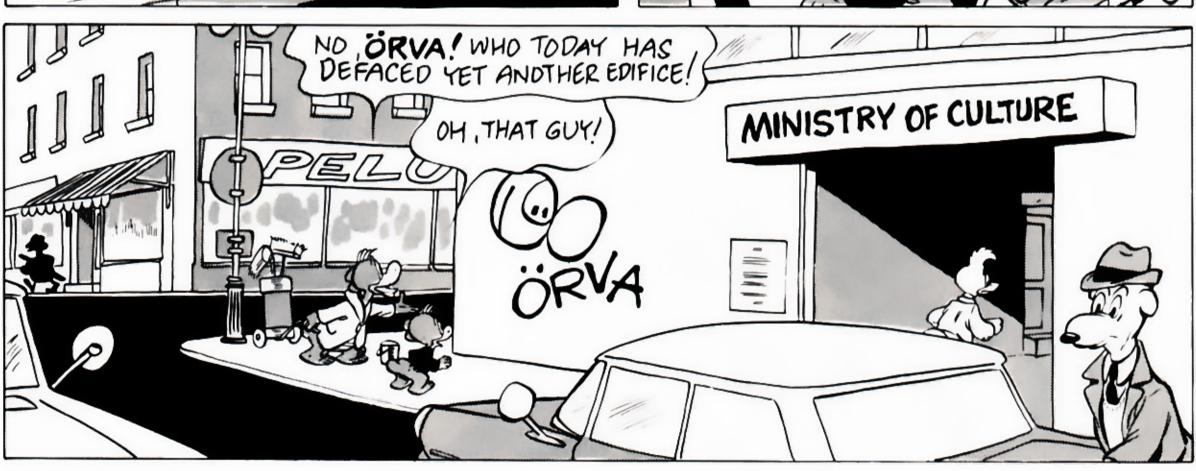


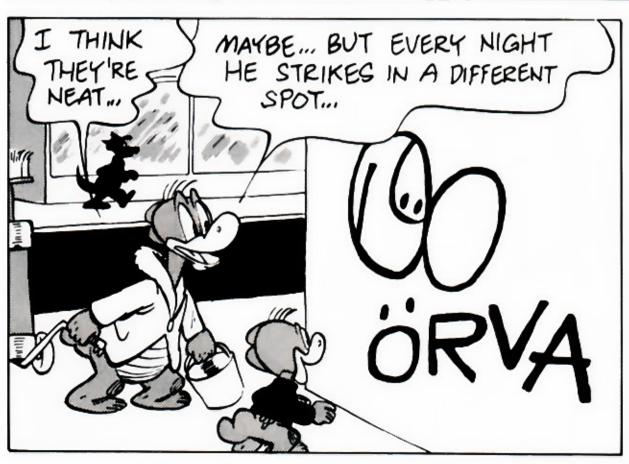








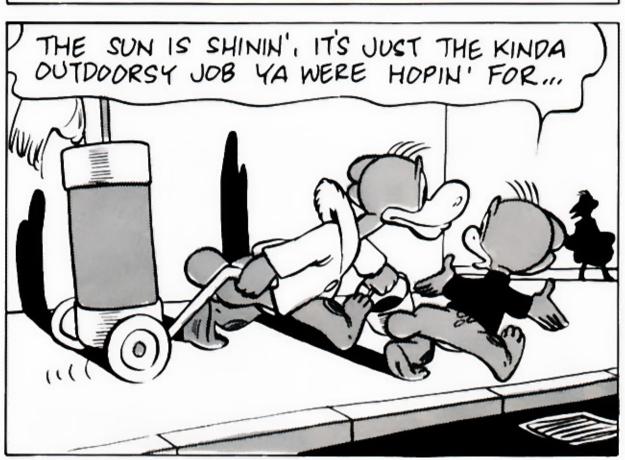




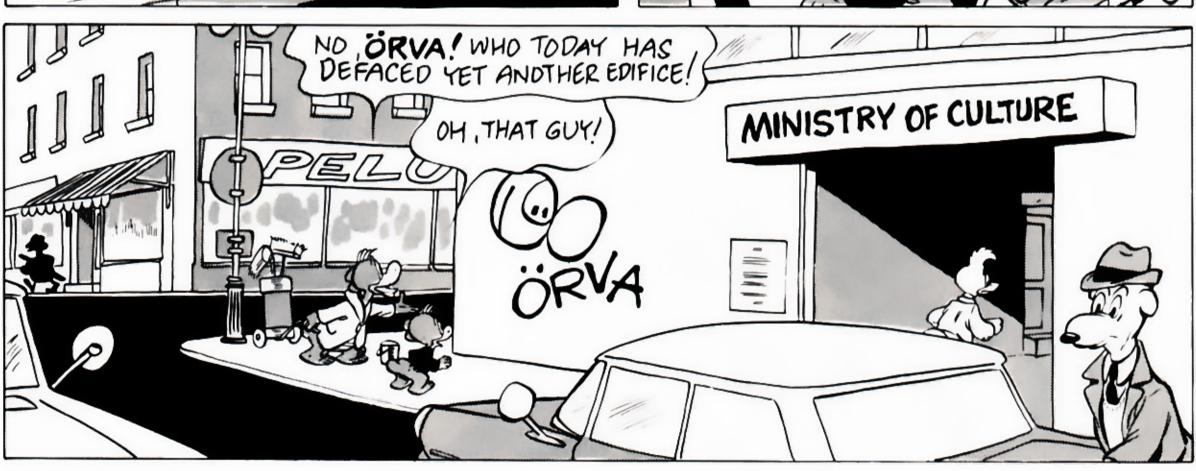


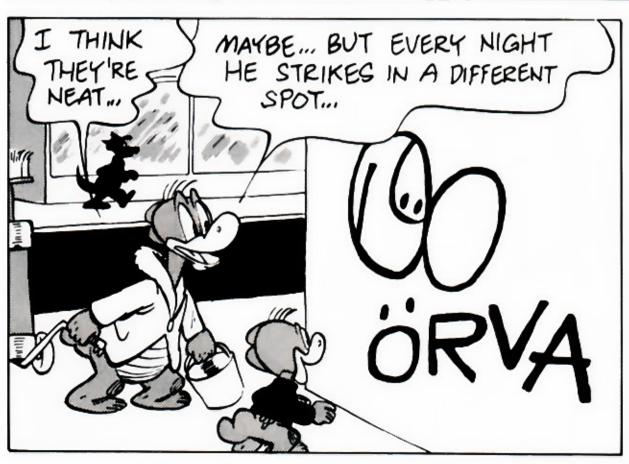




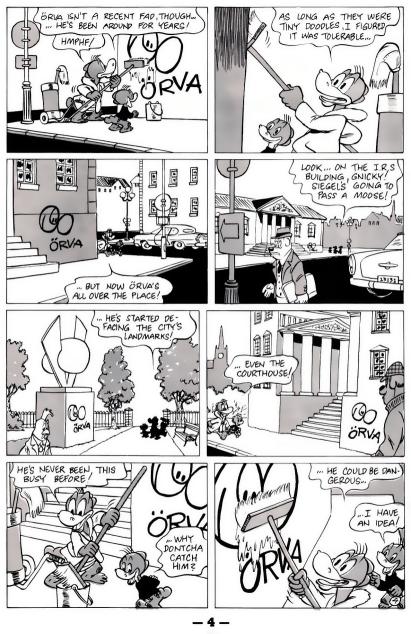






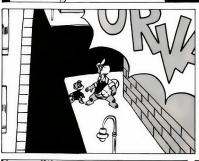


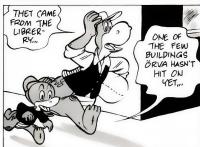


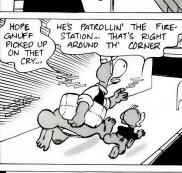


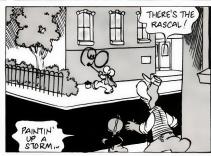


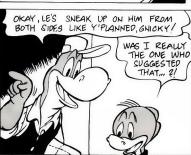




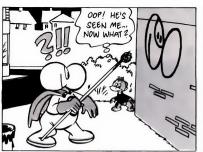


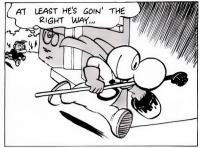


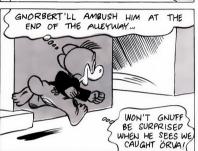














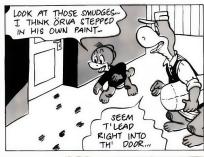






















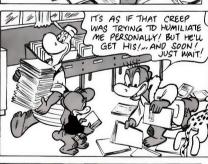


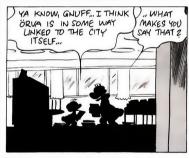
















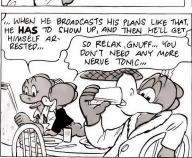
















SORRY GNUFF... I'M PUTTING ON A MAGIC.























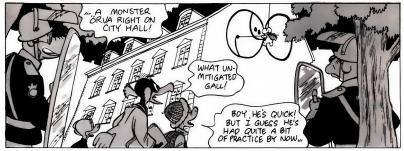










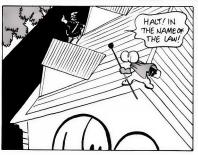




























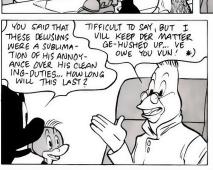










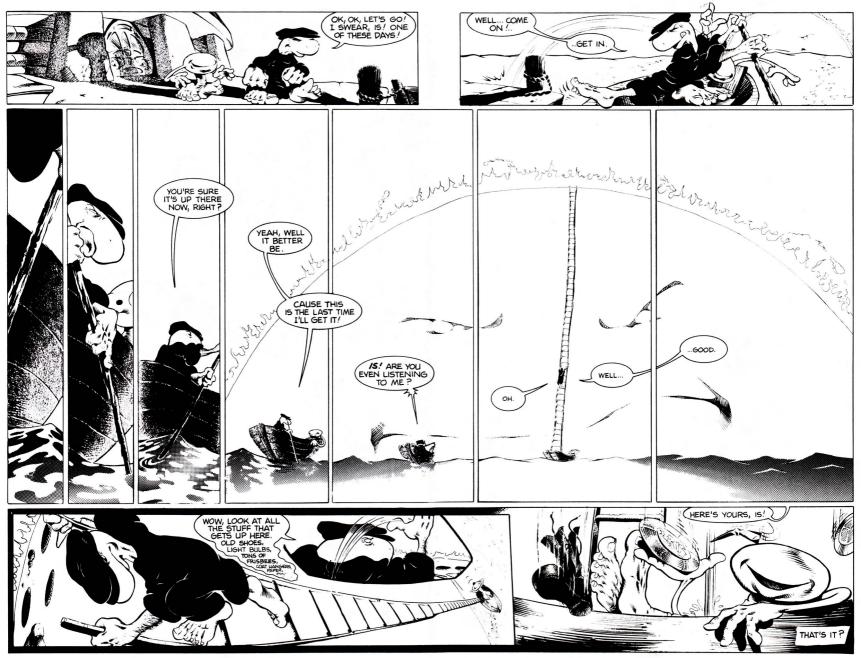












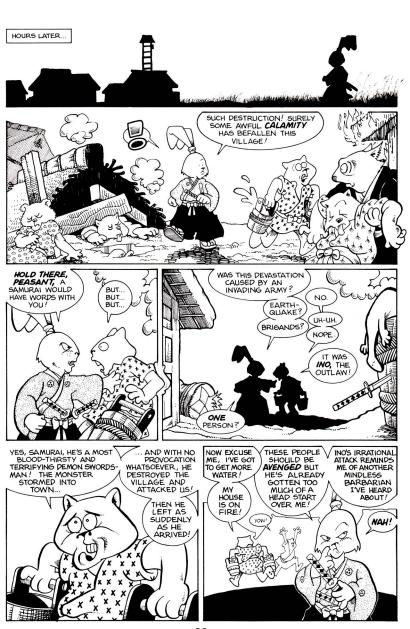
PARTICLE



Some things are dangerous, y'know?

FANTAGRAPHICS BOOKS

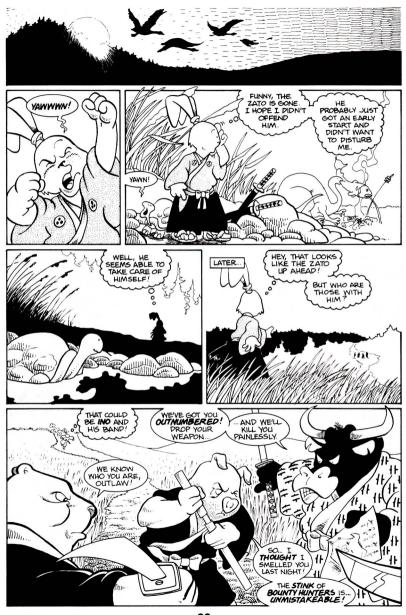




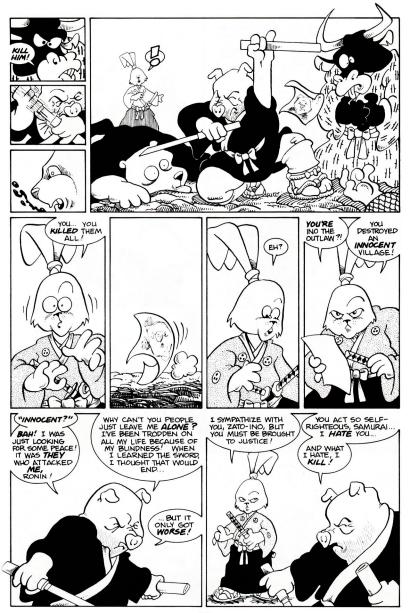


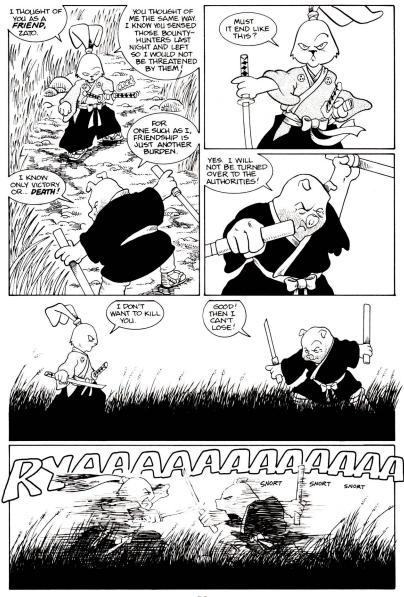






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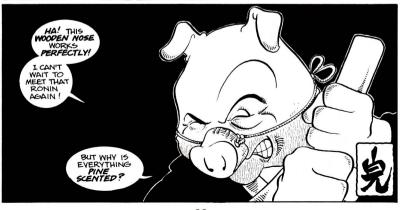














by Jan Strnad

Yep, you've dallied long enough. It's time for you to start picking up "one of the best titles around" (according to Martin Crookall of Fantasy Advertiser).

Dal's back in his own mini-series in the first offering from the new Upshot Graphics division of Fantagraphics Books! Here's what's in store for Dal fans, old and new, in the four-part series Flesh & Bones:



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And as if that weren't enough, every issue of Flesh & Bones sports a complete chapter of the indelible Bolefires Saga by those two crazy Brits Alan Moore and Steve Parkhouse. Is a humble rent collector any match for a girl who can "turn a cream egg into a diamond and then eat it anyway?" And doesn't the family werewolf violate the rule against keeping pets?



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To Order: Send check or money order for \$8.00 for all four issues of Flesh & Bones to: Flesh & Bones Subs. Fantagraphics Books, 4359 Cornell Road, Agoura CA 91301. All copies are mailed flat in an envelope.

[LETTERS, FROM INSIDE FRONT COVER] Let's give them time to get ahead (or at least less behind) on Omaha first, though.

Ken Macklin's Dr. Watchstop: Hm. Good thought. I'll work on that

Maxwell Mouse, Cerebus, Fish Police, Cutey Bunny, etc.: Why bother? All these series have

perfectly respectable homes of their own – seems a shame to take up space in Critters which could be used to feature some Critters-unique series.

Like, for instance, this issue's "Lizards." I tell you, this Sam Kieth fellow is going places. Aside from inking Matt Wagner's Mage (and doing a spectacular enough job on it to merit a "Best Art Team" Kirby Award nomination), he can write, he can draw, he can color, he can...well, he can't letter. So I should thank ace calligrapher Stan Sakai for jumping into the breach and lettering the "Lizards" story for us. Anyway, if you're looking for more Kieth work, Sam has a two-page fable in Anything Goes! #2, and is working on Wandering Stars, a seven-part limited series he's creating with Stuart Hopen for Fantagraphics Books. Well, let's do some letters.

Think I'll start off with a contentious missive and then aet into the "you're a genius" ones

Dear Mr. Thompson:

Critters sounds good in theory. It can't work in practice, to wit: a) the "Animals" should be

funny (Gnuff said);

b) \$2.00 price tag; c) Your idea that selling out 14,000 copies (a low count by my standards) meant this book is a success?!

d) And saying you must limit amount of copies printed be-cause of the books being B&Wlook at Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. How many zillions of printings has that gone through? How many people are now two years later trying to rip off the TMNT concept in one way or another. And you say the B&W audience is limited!!

From wit:

a) Gnuff said.

b, c, d) Print up enough copies to reach a wider audience through distribution and b) you can lower your price (look at Eclipse comix you dolt!) c) You'll really sell out 50,000 copies or more! and d) people will order more of #1 or #2 or even #3 and you'll be rich!

Q: Why is Steve Gallacci's art crisper looking in Albedo? In your book it looks washed out. It looks pencilled and charcoaled for shading but it seems

smudged in your book. Hopefully I've been helpful and the book will really take

PS: Great title for the lettercol, huh: "The Scratchin' Post.

> N. David Aiken Bronx, NY

Ah, grasshopper—being a city boy, you were apparently never handed this pearl of wisdom: "don't teach your grand-

mother how to suck eggs."
See, the problem with printing A LOT more copies than what distributors orde from you is that in VIRTUALLY EVERY CASE stores and distributors order abou as many as they're going to need, and if you print 50,000 more than they order, chances are excellent that you're going to be stuck with a lot of insulation. I hate to break it to you, but printing more copies doesn't automatically increase sales, any more than gambling with high stakes

increases your chances of win You may have noticed (well considering your letter, you may not, come to think of it) that all the Eclipse come to think of it that all the Eclipse tilles whose prices were lowered are super-hero titles—every one. This is because super-heroes are a popular genre; do a super-hero title, and you're guaranteed more readers than it you do a funny-animal title. (TERMACE MUTANT NINIA TURTLES is a fluke—I bet a big percentage of that book's sales goes to speculators anyway). You'll notice that when Eclipse does a P. Craig Russell opera book or REID FLEMING or whatever, those old \$2.00 pricetags get dusted off in a hurry. Dean Mullaney's no dolt. (A term, by the way, generally not considered part of a civil discussion,

except perhaps in the Bronx.)
As for Gallacci's art, you're right to an
extent: (a) our printer's been having some problems recently, and Steve's work has suffered a little as a result; (b) we work with a slightly coarser line screen—it gives the art less of an ultra-glossy texture, but I sort of favor the way it roughs it up a bit; (c) on one episode, Steve was without his airbrush (not charcoal, David) and had to make do with wash—that may be the episode that particularly struck you. As for the "funny" vs. "non-funny"

As for the "funny" vs. "non-funny" stuff, we've been around the block a couple times on that already, most recently with Brent Winter. In fact, I'll let the next letterwriter take care of that on he also covers the two-dollar dilemma.
(And if there's anything I really hate,
it's cute names for comics lettercolumns
Sorry, Dave.) _KT

Dear Kim,

This is probably going to devolve into a question of semantics, but the way I see it, "funny animal" needs a patina of humor about as much as 'comic book" requires slapstick. The fact that "Birthright" uses a world of foxes, bears, and the like makes it all the more poignant - it's not just a bunch of neurotics running around in leotards, as DC or Marvel or First might be tempted to render it. Winter himself says it: "...the soul of a funny-animal is the reflection of our own humanity. As odd as it may seem, a story like "Birthright" is all the more "human" because of the funnyanimal element. As one of your other letter-writers points out, animals don't kill for greed or power" (greed, no, but power, maybe). She goes on: "I feel sorry to see them doing it." And that is why it works: it puts us in touch with those feelings we might not otherwise express if it were ("Yawn.") humans doing it to each other.

As a collector who specializes in the independents. I can fully understand why I'm paying two bucks for black-and-white. A way out of this spiral might be a sort of "collective printing" that gathers together a number of short-run black-and-whites like yourself in such a way that it makes it more economical for you and the printer. Granted, the logistics would be maddening, but.

I understand Critters #1 is doing bonzo in the resale market. If that's any barometer of success, you guys are apparently doing something right. My own collection is based on artistic merits, like Chaykin and Wagner and Messner-Loebs (as well as a few others) - and as such Critters will be on the purchase list for as long as you can keep up the obvious quality.

By the way, the "Crustacean" piece was terrific! Who are these demented people?

Sean Martin Toledo, OH

I'm not sure I WANT to know. I've only seen a couple of Toren Smith's stories in various Eclipse Comics, but Lela Dowling is fairly well known in comics fandom for her fantasy art. She was originally slated to collaborate on a CUTEY BUNNY story to collaborate on a CUTEY BURNY stor with Josh Quagmire for an early issue of CRITTERS—I understand that story will now be appearing in ARMY SURPLUS KOMIKZ whenever they get it finished

Thanks for the kind words. Here's another rebuttal to Mr. Winter.

Dear Mr. Kim Thompson.

I write to you exclusively for the benefit and defense of Critters against that most opinionated letter of Mister Brent Winter in issue #5.

Before I go into any rebuke of Mister Winter's opinions, I would like to say that I admire his ability to be direct, frank (not to mention blunt), and to the point-though it could have been employed in a more useful manner than "downtrodding" an independent comic (though it was good of him to state at the beginning that they were just his opinions!).

The way the gentleman writes and stresses his point makes it seem that (a) he literally swaggers across the paper. making demands and opinions as if he were an assitant editor, and (b) he has no more imagination than a roasted peanut.

I must say that he has the right idea about the words Funny Animal" but has entirely the wrong meaning. Pretty much everyone is guilty of using those words in context with any artistic publication having anthropomorphic animals regardless of what type of story it might tell, whether it was truly comical, or very serious; and he has the right idea that

some stories cannot, in the least,

be considered "Funny Animal" (e.g., Albedo, "Erma Felna, E.D.F."; Critters, "Birthright"; and from both, "Usagi Yojimbo"-to name a few.)

I myself have been trying vainly to have people understand that "Funny Animal" is no longer a "catch-all" term. Now, in this day and age, with a myriad of Anthropomorphic publications coming out, those

two no longer work! (I am sure that Mr. Gallacci has heard of me, from my many letters to him, and my "quirk" that "Erma Felna, E.D.F." and "Usaqi Yojimbo" are epic Anthropomorphic sagas, and not "Funny Animal," because neither one can be considered "funny or humorous in any sense. And mind you, Mr. Kim Thompson, I find the word "Anthropomorphic" very easy to say.)

As you can probably denote from my letter. I am very much a fan of Steve's work: I also like to think of myself as a connoisseur of Anthropomorphic fanzines and books. I regard Albedo's "Erma Felna, E.F.D." and Critters' "Birthright" as the ultimate in Anthropomorphic literature, and I feel both those stories are perfect with their cast, and would just be hopelessly ruined if it was made with a human cast, or had the introduction of humans in it.

In that respect, I would never have bought Albedo or Critters if anything like that were in

either.

I very much liked "Captain Jack," but as I said I am strictly Anthropomorphic. That story did not appeal to me that much. except for a brief bit of comic relief.

"Gnuff," too, was very good, a little more so than "Captain Jack," in that at points, it is serious, especially with Milton being a very intriguing and interesting storyteller.

I see that Mister Winter has only his opinion that Critters may flop because of its vagueness in its terminology. But what I do with my money is none of his concern. As for Critters, I will continually put down my two dollars for as long as it remains on the shelf.

Wayne Powers Austin, TX

Thanks for the kind words, Wayne. You may think ''anthropomorphic'' is easy to say, but it's not the kind of word I like to gracefully slip into conversation every couple of lines or so. (And boy, is it a

pain to typeset!)
Although I obviously agree more with
you than with Brent Winter, I think you may be taking a little too much of the opposite viewpoint—I've found a number of the "FUNNY-funny-animal" strips of the past to be delightful, and have a few samples of this kind of material coming up-including, in fact, Ty Templeton's swell eight-pager next issue. Hope you

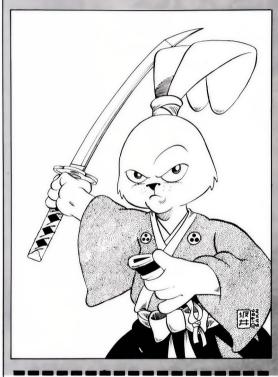
Well, the end of the page is looming. Next issue, I should be able to print more than three letters—including an interesting Q&A with Stan Sakai on the finer points of Usagi Yojimbo's weaponry.

See you then! —KIM THOMPSON

CREDITS: "Gnuff" was written, drawn, lettered, and toned by Freddy Milton and translated by Kim Thompson. "Lizards" was written and drawn by Sam Kieth and lettered by Stan Sakai. "Usagi Yojimbo" was written. drawn, and lettered by Stan Sakai. The cover was drawn and colored by Freddy Milton. One last time: the logo is still by Freddy and 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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Coming up in the next issue of CRITTERS (we promise honest!): The return of Tom Stazer's "Lionheart" in a novellength epic of mystery and terror! Mark Armstrong's second "Firecracker Jack" tale! Ty Templeton's tribute to one of the alltime great funny-animal cartoonists! And, the issue after that, "The Return of Orva"! So...Isn't it time you subscribed, bub?



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