

the
Adventuress
no. 2



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EDITOR & PUBLISHER: Al Tanner. ILLISONE & ALIX written and illustrated by Carol Strickland; STELLA written and illustrated by Bob Rodi; RAVEN written and illustrated by Ted Delorme; THE SPIRITTE written and illustrated by Chris Padovano; KARLA written and illustrated by Kirk Hastings. Cover by Carol Strickland. Page 2 illustrations by Bob Rodi and Tom O'Reilly.

part 2

Illisone and Alix

by Carol A. Strickland



Fog swirled grayly as the tiny boat glided through still waters. Ho, Whatharl!" The whispered call was more question than demand.

"Here!"

The pre-dawn mists echoed and muffled the reply. Nedif searched the blackness in vain for a clue as to the voice's location. From behind, a hand brushed his shoulder, then pointed ahead. "There," he heard his cousin Alix whisper. Without question, Nedif followed her directions, guiding the boat onward, oars gently lapping the water.

Suddenly, a large, gray figure appeared out of the void. It chuckled and moved closer.

"Welcome home, brother Nedif...cousin Alix! How've you been?" He slapped his brother so hard that Nedif sprawled across and out of the boat, splashing head-down into the water.

Nedif came up spitting sand between his teeth, his golden hair grimed and dripping with mud, but with a mischievous gleam in his eyes. "I'm fine, brother Whatharl," he shouted, "but how are you?" He heaved himself out of the water, hurtling in a flying tackle at Whatharl.

As they disappeared below the surface, Alix climbed out of the boat, laughing. "Hey, isn't anyone going to help me with this?" she called, pulling on a rope attached to the boat.

Whatharl, water pouring off his dark hair, looked down at his twin. Nedif looked back at Arl, then turned to Alix.

"Of course, dear cousin," he curtsied.

"Assistance is freely given, milady," Whatharl bowed.

Alix shook her head slowly and backed away. "On the other hand..." The two men sprang at her, shoving her down to the river bottom; all three arose spitting and laughing.

"Welcome home!" Whatharl gasped between coughs as he pounded on the two's backs.

They dragged the boat through delta mud and



reeds, hiding it in a shoreline thicket. Then they mounted three horses and rode through the lightening fog into a forest.

Alix was the first to break the sudden silence. "The Family's message warned of danger," she said, wiping some mud from her hair.

Whatharl scowled. "Aye, bad trouble. The people of Mor Grodan know who we are... in a way. Someone's trumped up the story a bit; they have us being immortal demons, out to take all the gold in the city."

"Surely the people don't believe it," Nedif protested.

"That's what we thought, til it became apparent two days ago that someone was emphasizing the 'immortals' part of the story. Le's been pointing out that Talborians don't live too long. The people are beginning to be jealous. Even our friends are starting to avoid us."

"But how did such a story leak out? No one but family knows about us."

Alix was silent for a moment before she spoke. "It sounds as if one of the children accidentally bragged about the wrong thing to one of lir friends. The 'demons' sound as if they'd been filtered through a child's imagination."

"So we thought. It was bound to happen sometime."

Nedif bit his lip. "And the next step?"

"...Will be up to Illesone," Whatharl replied. "She's been taken to the royal palace. It will be up to her to get on the good side of the king, and then persuade him that we mean no harm."

"Then we've got it made," Nedif grinned. "Sony has a way of making people like her."

"Announcing Captain Lenna and the Lady Illesone of Ji Reish," the Master of Ceremonies intoned. Confidently, Illesone stepped forward, across the tiled floor to the throne. Behind her, Lenna walked hesitantly, half-afraid that her masquerade as a sea captain should be found out; half-afraid at the dismal, claustrophobic surroundings. How she longed for sun glistening off white sails, and the singing of the surf to the open sky!

But Sony saw only the lavish richness, the magnificence of the royal court. And among it all was King Keswirl, lord of the lands of Arta, keeper of the royal city Mor Grodan.

"Sire..." she smiled prettily, then swooped down in a flourishing curtsy. Lenna bowed nervously.

"Arise, Captain...Lady. What business have you?"

Sony lifted her face toward Keswirl, resisting an impulse to flick back imaginary, long strands of her newly-cut hair.

"I bring a token of peace, milord. The necklace of Duke Bralin of Ji Reish." She triumphantly produced a be-rubied wonder, a band of crimson jewels.

An aide took it and presented it to the king. He examined it, held it to the light to see it sparkle, and then motioned for an aide to fasten it about his neck. Another brought a hand mirror and held it before him.

Keswirl smiled at his reflection, finding it extremely satisfactory. He turned a bit and smiled some more. "Ah!" he sighed, turning to Illesone. "Truly, it is magnificent. Tell me, dear Lady, what group or person presents

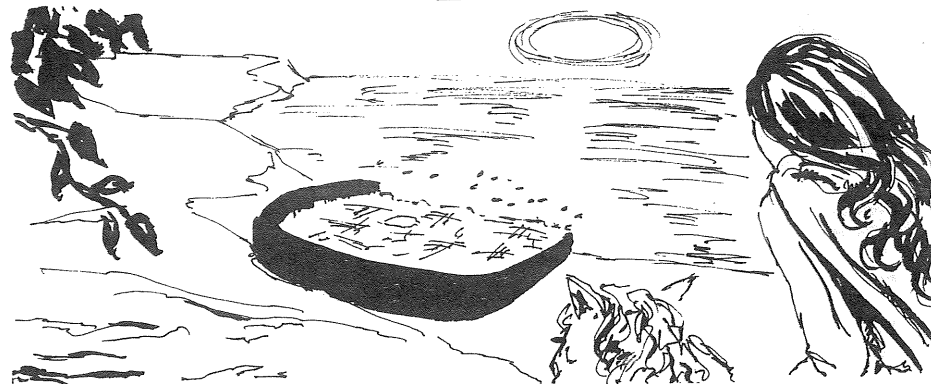


me with this, that I might show them my grace."

Illesone tried, rather unsuccessfully, to appear modest as she curtsied again. "Milord Keswirl, wisest king of Talbor, it is from a group who hopes this gift finds favor in your eyes. They are of this city, Mor Grodan, and are the simple people called Averians."

"Averians." Keswirl turned from his entranced reflection. His gaze hardened on the woman. "Averians!" He wrenched the band off his neck and threw it, in a shower of rubies, on the floor in front of Illesone. The jewels danced across the tiles in all directions, flashing angry red on the walls, but none could match the livid vermilion of the king's face.

"A-ve-ri-ans!" he screamed once more. Keswirl turned abruptly and stormed out of the room.



Riding parallel to the river, they came to the sea and the great, walled city of Mor Grodan. Coming out from the cool, blue-green shadows of the forest, the sudden vision of Grodan's mica battlements, flashing blackly against the still-misty aquamarine sea in the early-morning light made the three cousins stop in wonder before continuing through the city gates.

Perhaps a stranger to Mor Grodan would have noticed the unusual cleanliness of the city; the cousins did not give it second thought, but rode ahead through dense morning crowds. The people made way before them, then muttered angrily as they recognized the distinctive equipage and costumes. "Averians!" "Next thing you know, they'll be stealin' our children for their demon rites!" "There's that Averian Whatharl - he'll buy up the whole town 'fore he's done."

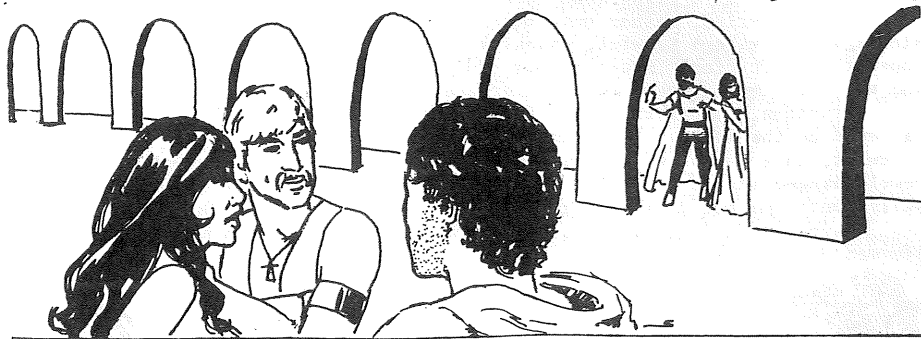
Troubled by what she had heard in the crowd, Alix drew the hood of her cloak tighter around her face.

They traveled further; the crowds thinned out, then deserted the quarter in which they rode. A wall stretched in front of them, its adobe stretch stretching for blocks, with only narrow openings to break its monotony. They chose one opening, and went single-file into it to emerge on the other side in the midst of a walled orchard and field. Children ran and played; adults tended the crops or worked around a stable and house on the other end of the enclosure.

"Hey! Al and Nedif are back!" The call was repeated until everyone had forgotten their work, laid down their tools and were running to meet the newcomers. The two found themselves overwhelmed by swarms of children and adults, all trying to embrace them in welcome.

"How are you, Charra! No, Sanner, I don't have a present for you this time. I'm afraid Sony and I had to leave Ji Reish in a bit of a hurry. Why, Niki! How you've grown! Ben! Beniri! Where are Mother and Father?"

A dark-haired man, slightly older than Alix but looking very much like her, pushed through the crowd. "Alright, everybody! The good captain and my sister will see you all in good time. Right now, I have to talk to them. You



heard me! Back to work!"

"Hello, Al...Nedif," he said as they dismounted. "Mom and Dad are at the docks...overseeing the loading."

"Of what? Surely not..."

"I'm afraid so. We're leaving Mor Grodan. The children will leave tonight, but we'll stay on until the last possible minute, or until this mess is cleared up."

"It really is that bad, then," Alix sighed. "Until now, I hadn't really realized it. Ben, where are we going to go?"

"I don't know, Al. I just don't know. Cousin, we'll need your ship to help."

"Of course, Ben. I'll have Lenna supervise it."

"Nedif! Al! Come here! There's someone I want you to meet!" Whatharl was calling from the house. The two cousins excused themselves and joined Arl. Arl felt strange in the cool shadows of the building, for it was bare of almost all furniture; her steps echoed from the stone walls. It was not anything like the warm, comfortable home she had grown up in.

"Here." She turned to see who Whatharl was standing next to. A young woman with skin much darker than Alix', almost black, stood calmly, quietly waiting to be introduced. She wore a pale pink robe and gown, richly embroidered as if for a queen. Alix suddenly became aware of how the mud was still caked on her own traveling clothes. She blushed and tried to wipe some of the dirt off her face and straighten her tousled hair.

Arl was oblivious to this. "Nedif, Alix," he announced, "I'd like to present my fiance Batipe. She's a tailor from across town."

Batipe smiled warmly. "Whatharl has told me so much about you... and your sister Sony, Alix. It's so nice to meet you."

"I'd hug you if I were clean, Batipe. Welcome to the family!"

Nedif looked shocked. "Fiance!" he muttered over and over. Then, disregarding his own dirt-covered condition, he gave Batipe a bear hug. "Congratulations! Hope you like our people. Arl, I never thought I'd see you married!"

Batipe smiled again. "I'd like to get more acquainted with you, Nedif, but I'm afraid my business won't wait. "Arl, will you take me home?" Her fiance bowed and took her arm. Bidding Nedif and Al goodbye, they left.

"Do you realize," Al said, "it has been twelve hours since we ate? I'm hungry."

"How can you say that at a time like this?" Nedif chided her. "But I am, too. Let's go. Married! I can't get over it!"

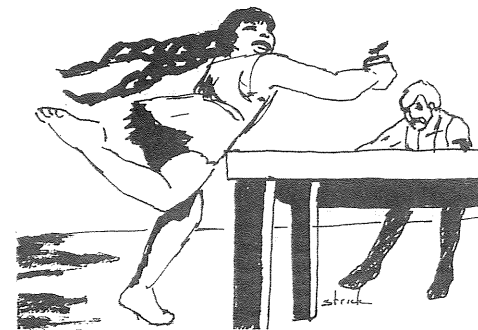
They passed through another archway and found themselves in a street, alone save for a dog that slept some distance away from them.

"I guess no one likes to be around demons," Nedif growled under his breath. He stalked across the cobblestones to an open-air market. It was deserted, save for two employees, playing cards in a corner. Or was it?

A shadowy figure snatched an apple from a bin. "Hey!" One of the employees had spotted the movement out of the corner of his eye. "Hey- hey stop her, Nedif!" he shouted.

Nedif looked up just in time to see a young, ragged girl running toward him, looking backwards at the yelling man. The captain quickly blocked her exit from the market, tackling her as she dived under a table.

He pulled her out as Alix and the shopkeeper came running. The child was filthy. Her clothes were in tatters; she had no shoes. Black braids fell over her dark skin. Green eyes flashing her resistance, she kicked him.



"Ow! Why you -"

"Let me go!" she yelled in a childish-high voice.

"Easy, kid. Why'd you steal that apple? There's plenty of fruit in the street-trees."

"I didn't want street-tree fruit. Let go o' me!" She struggled in his grasp.

"Nedif, thanks!" the shopkeeper puffed to a stop beside him.

"This one's been haunting the shop

for a week. Funny... She never made a move til just now, when you two started across the street." He shook the girl soundly. "What's your name? Where are your family?" She didn't answer so he shook her again. "What's your name, guttersnipe?"

"Iba," she muttered. "I ain't got no family. Oh, here's your stupid apple back!" She threw the fruit on the ground at the keeper's feet. He released her.

Shaking herself out, she turned, then suddenly realized Alix was standing there. Startled, she glanced at Alix' eyes, then stood entranced, her gaze transfixed by something she saw there.

Similarly, Alix stood still, studying Iba's face. After some time, she whispered, "So that's it."

"I had a dream," Iba said slowly. "I saw you - here, then I could see myself...with a family, a real family. I-I haven't had a home in so long..." She lowered her eyes, ashamedly. "I just took the apple to get your attention."

"Great Kaz, why didn't you just introduce yourself?" Nedif sighed.

"What we have here, cousins," Alix said, "is a genuine, non-Averian esper. I had a premonition about her a few weeks ago, but never understood it until now. Listen, Iba, how would you like to meet real Averians?"

"Demons?"

"No, I said Averians. Tell you what; if you like them, you can stay."

Nedif watched closely as the girl made up her mind. Her fear at meeting "demons" seemed to be outweighed by her longing for a family. Finally, she spoke.

"Okay," she chirped, and skipped ahead of them as they returned home. Alix laughed; Nedif shook his head. "It looks like you have yourself a new sister, Al. Hope your parents don't mind."

"Will that be all, milady?" Sony turned to the valet, who had just finished putting her clothes away.

"Yes, thank you." Sony nodded dismissal. At least Keswirl hadn't thrown her out of the palace - she looked in the mirror across the room and winked at herself, grinning. Keswirl had a reputation for keeping beautiful women around, regardless of their political leanings. And if





she said so herself, Sony thought, she was looking great today. Of course, it helped that Keswirl didn't know she was Averian.

Reluctantly, she tore herself away from the mirror, and went out to the balcony which overlooked the palace's vast gardens. Sony gazed over them, into the blue distance. Would she play up to the king, or would she be a business-like diplomat? No, there was no time for honest diplomacy; the reaction of the court to her mere mention of Averians had shown her that the situation was far worse than either she, Alix, or Nedif had imagined.

What was needed here was trickery such as she had used when Alix had informed her that Duke Bralin's necklace had to be stolen for the good of the Family. Trickery: low, debasing and sly. Sony smiled to herself; such plans were her forte.

The king? With his roving eye, he'd be a cinch to snare...if she could stalk him between official functions. Hmm...

Movement in the gardens. Illesone looked down and smiled as her plans suddenly fell into place. Yes, this was going to be an interesting stay, she chuckled to herself.

Prince Rianne glanced up as a lithe figure glided out from behind the hedge in front of him.

"Oh, excuse me!" the woman apologized. "But these are the most magnificent gardens-! I'm afraid I was looking at the flowers instead of where I was going -" she eyed the prince up and down, "-although that's the last time I do that." She smiled up into deep brown eyes. "Tell me, do you know this place well? Could you give me a tour?"

"I-I'm afraid you'll have to forgive me for being a bit startled, ms." Rianne smiled uneasily. "But I'm not used to such openness. I am Prince Rianne."

"Oh!" Sony feigned surprise, then curtsied deeply. "A thousand pardons, Highness. I did not-"

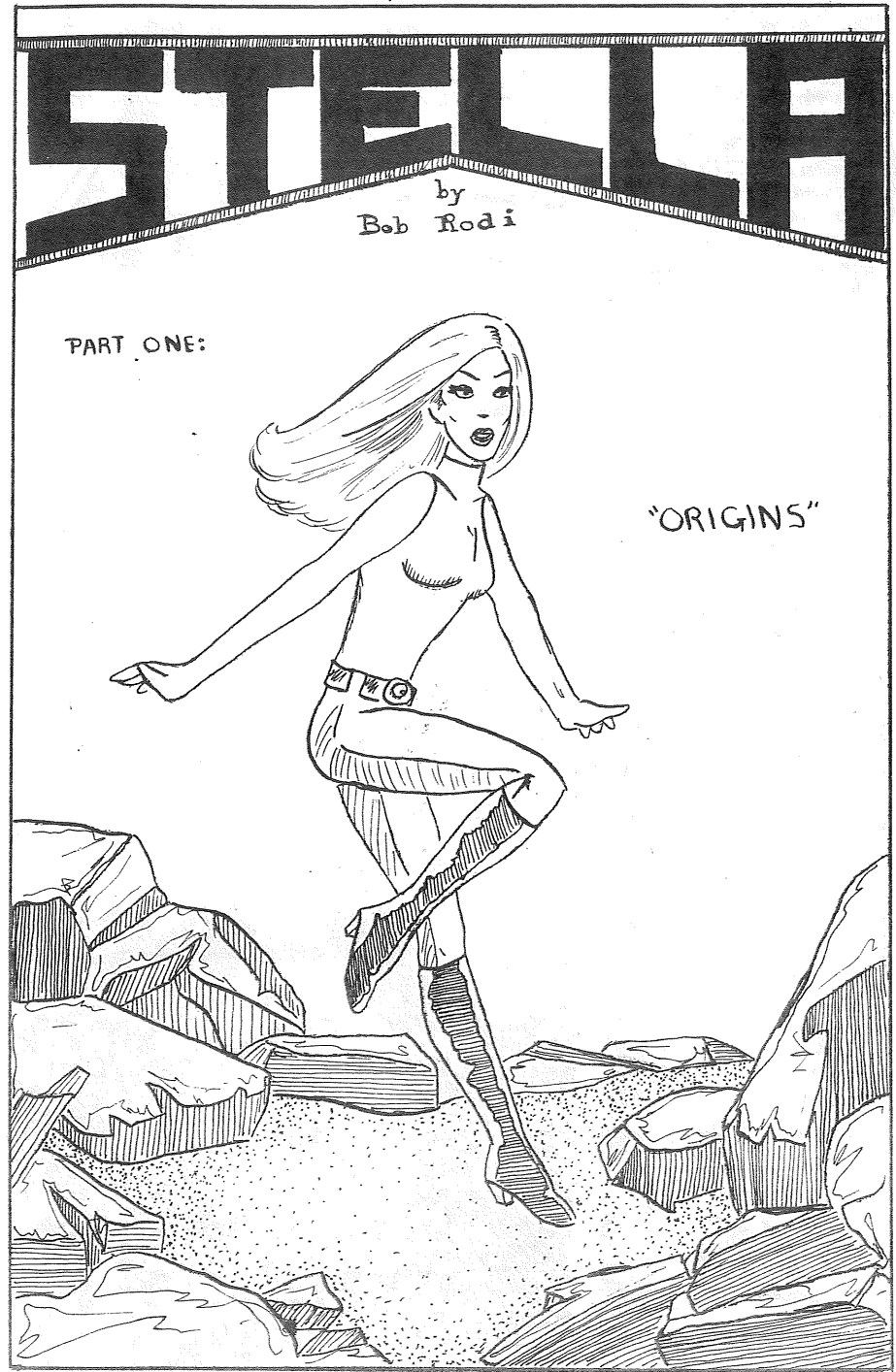
"That's quite all right. I find your openness refreshing after all the stuffy royal protocol."

"You don't mind?"

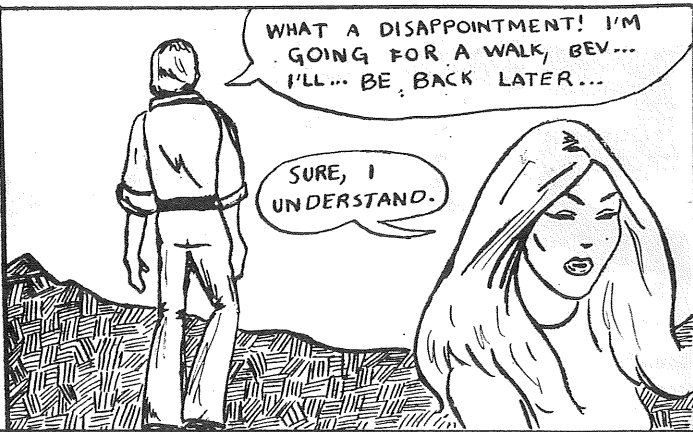
"Of course not." He took hold of her hand and drew her up out of the curtsy. "Now, as for that tour... By the way, what is your name?"

"Lady Illesone." She leaned closer to him. "But my good friends call me Sony," she whispered.

to be continued



The Scene: A SMALL, UNINHABITED, ROCKY ISLAND IN THE MEDITERRANEAN, WHERE DR. BEV O'NEAL, NOTED ARCHAEOLOGIST, AND HER ASSOCIATE, STEPHEN LERNER. THEIR EXPEDITION HAS PROVEN TO BE A DISMAL FAILURE- AS THEY PREPARE TO LEAVE ...



WHAT A DISAPPOINTMENT! I'M GOING FOR A WALK, BEV... I'LL... BE BACK LATER...

SURE, I UNDERSTAND.



BUT...

HE'S GONE... NOW I'LL CHECK THAT CAVE I FOUND... ON MY OWN!! POOR GUY, I COULDN'T LET HIM GET HIS HOPES AGAIN...

BEV QUICKLY RACES TO THE SITE OF A SMALL CAVE SHE SPOTTED SEVERAL DAYS BEFORE AND PREPARES TO EXPLORE IT...

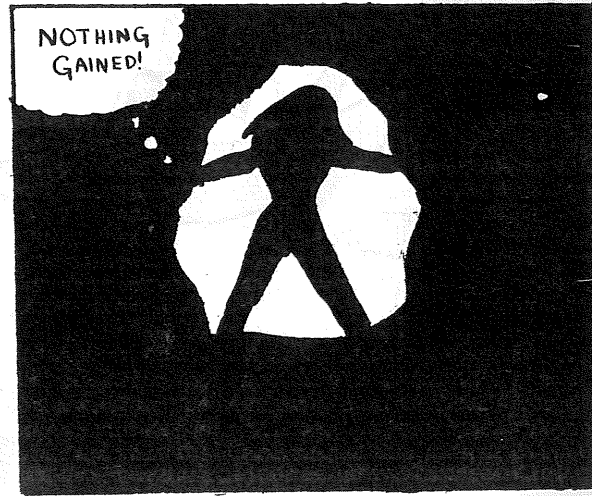


WHEW! PRETTY TIGHT SQUEEZE... BUT I'VE GOT TO REMEMBER MY PERSONAL PHILOSOPHY...



WHICH IS...

NOTHING VENTURED...



NOTHING GAINED!

BEV GINGERLY EXAMINES THE SMALL CAVE AND MEETS WITH DISAPPOINTMENT WHEN SHE FINDS NOTHING OF ANY INTEREST.



NOTHING!
NOT A SINGLE THING OUT OF PLACE! THERE'S NOT A THING HERE THAT'S THE SLIGHTEST BIT...



UNUSUAL...

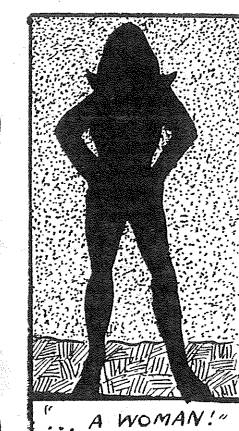


A STAIRWAY!!

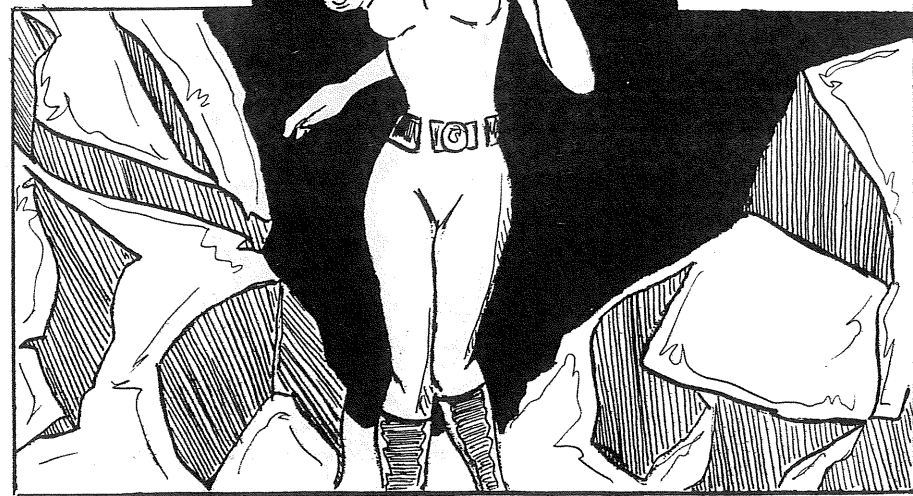


DESCENDING THE STAIRS WITH THE STEALTH OF A CAT, BEV HAPPENS INTO AN OPEN SPACE...

TORCHES? IN THIS CAVE? AND OVER THERE...



"... A WOMAN!"



BEV GASPS AS...

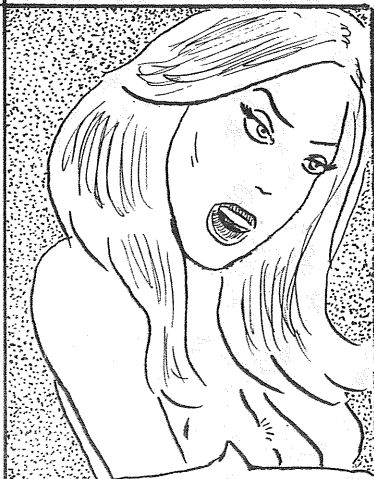


THE WOMAN STEPS INTO THE LIGHT IN HER WARRIOR-LIKE SPLENDOR...



GOOD DAY, MY STELLA... I HAVE BEEN EXPECTING YOU FOR SOME TIME NOW...

WHAT? YOU MEAN ME? MY NAME IS BEVERLY, NOT STELLA, AND... AND I...



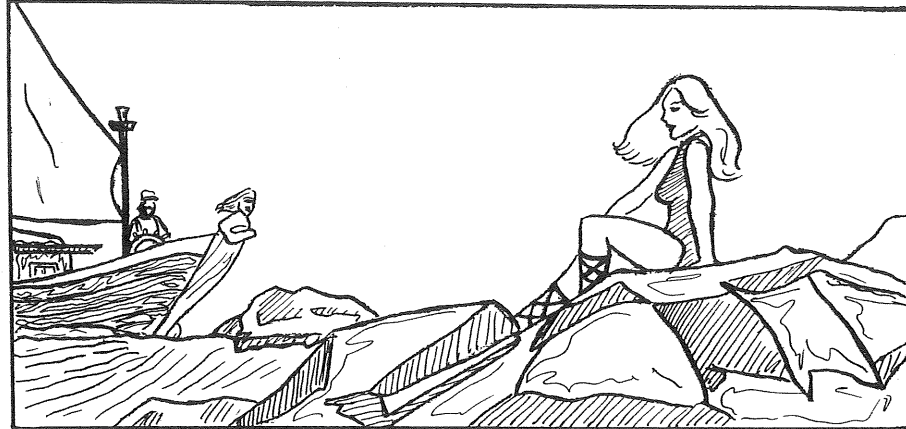
I SENSE YOUR QUESTIONS, AND THEY ARE UNDERSTANDABLE... IF YOU WILL PERMIT ME, I WILL ATTEMPT TO ANSWER THEM.

PERMISSION GRANTED!

"MY NAME IS SONA, AND I AM FROM ANOTHER PLANET IN ANOTHER STELLAR SYSTEM. I AM A SIREN, AS WAS ALL MY RACE. WE LIVED ON OUR LUSH, GREEN WORLD, UNTIL HARPIES DROVE US HERE."

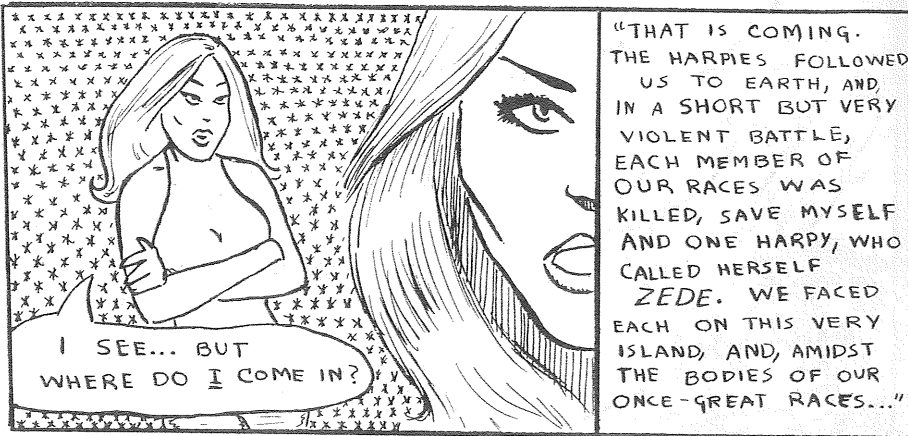


THE HARPIES... HALF-BIRD, HALF-HUMAN. WE SOUGHT THE AID OF YOUR HUMAN RACE, BUT THEY CALLED US WITCHES AND BANNED US TO UNINHABITED, ROCKY ISLANDS, SUCH AS THIS. WE USED OUR HYPNOTIC VOICES TO EXACT REVENGE, BY DRIVING SEAMEN TO THEIR DEATHS."



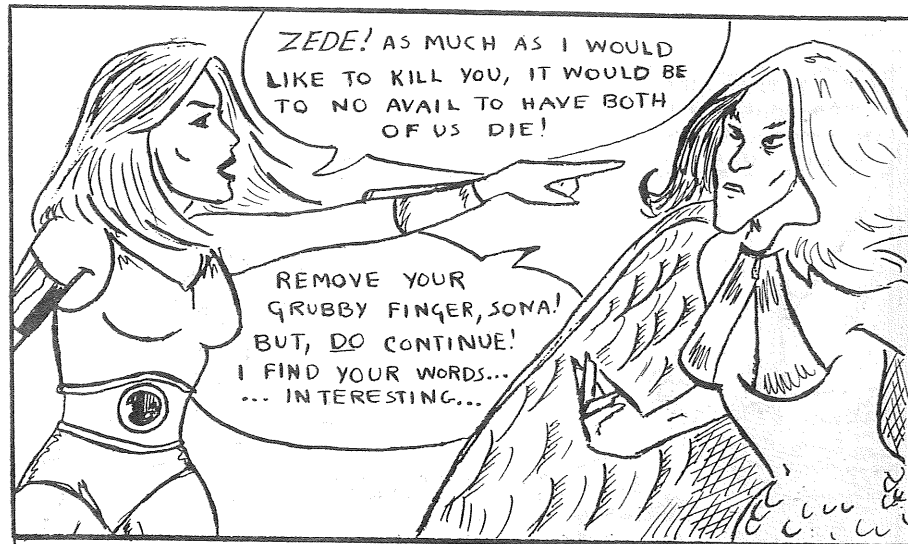
"I NOW REALIZE THE ERROR OF OUR WAYS. I MYSELF HAVE MORE THAN ATONED FOR THE DEATHS I HAVE CAUSED WITH THESE ENDLESS YEARS OF WAITING. THE DEATHS WE CAUSED ONLY MADE US MORE EVIL IN THE EYES OF THE HUMAN RACE, AND WE BECAME LEGENDARY VILLAINESSES, WHEN WE ACTUALLY WERE NOTHING OF THE SORT."





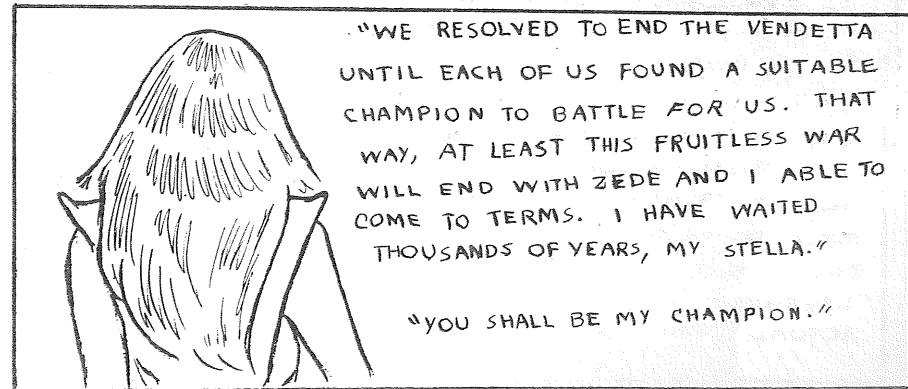
I SEE... BUT WHERE DO I COME IN?

"THAT IS COMING. THE HARPIES FOLLOWED US TO EARTH, AND, IN A SHORT BUT VERY VIOLENT BATTLE, EACH MEMBER OF OUR RACES WAS KILLED, SAVE MYSELF AND ONE HARPY, WHO CALLED HERSELF ZEDE. WE FACED EACH ON THIS VERY ISLAND, AND, AMIDST THE BODIES OF OUR ONCE-GREAT RACES..."



ZEDE! AS MUCH AS I WOULD LIKE TO KILL YOU, IT WOULD BE TO NO AVAIL TO HAVE BOTH OF US DIE!

REMOVE YOUR GRUBBY FINGER, SONA! BUT, DO CONTINUE! I FIND YOUR WORDS... ... INTERESTING...



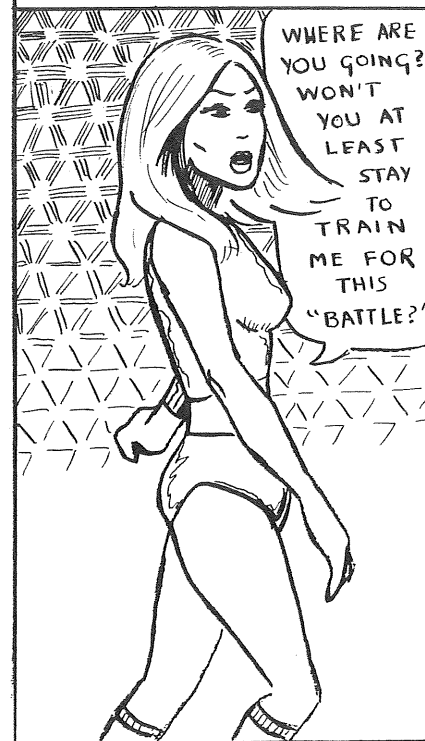
"WE RESOLVED TO END THE VENDETTA UNTIL EACH OF US FOUND A SUITABLE CHAMPION TO BATTLE FOR US. THAT WAY, AT LEAST THIS FRUITLESS WAR WILL END WITH ZEDE AND I ABLE TO COME TO TERMS. I HAVE WAITED THOUSANDS OF YEARS, MY STELLA."

"YOU SHALL BE MY CHAMPION."



NOTE YOUR NEW ATTIRE. IT WILL SUIT YOU BETTER FOR BATTLE. I GIVE YOU MY POWER OF HYPNOTIC VOICE, AND I GIVE YOU THE NAME "STELLA," MEANING "STAR-CHILD."

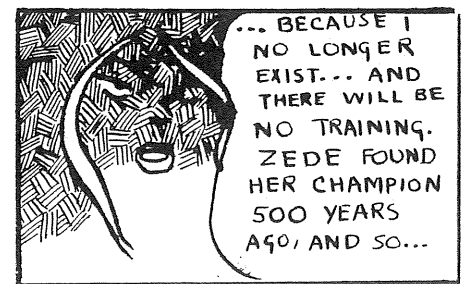
HOW'D YOU DO THIS? AND, HEY, WHAT'S THIS ABOUT A BATTLE? I HAVE SO MANY QUESTIONS...



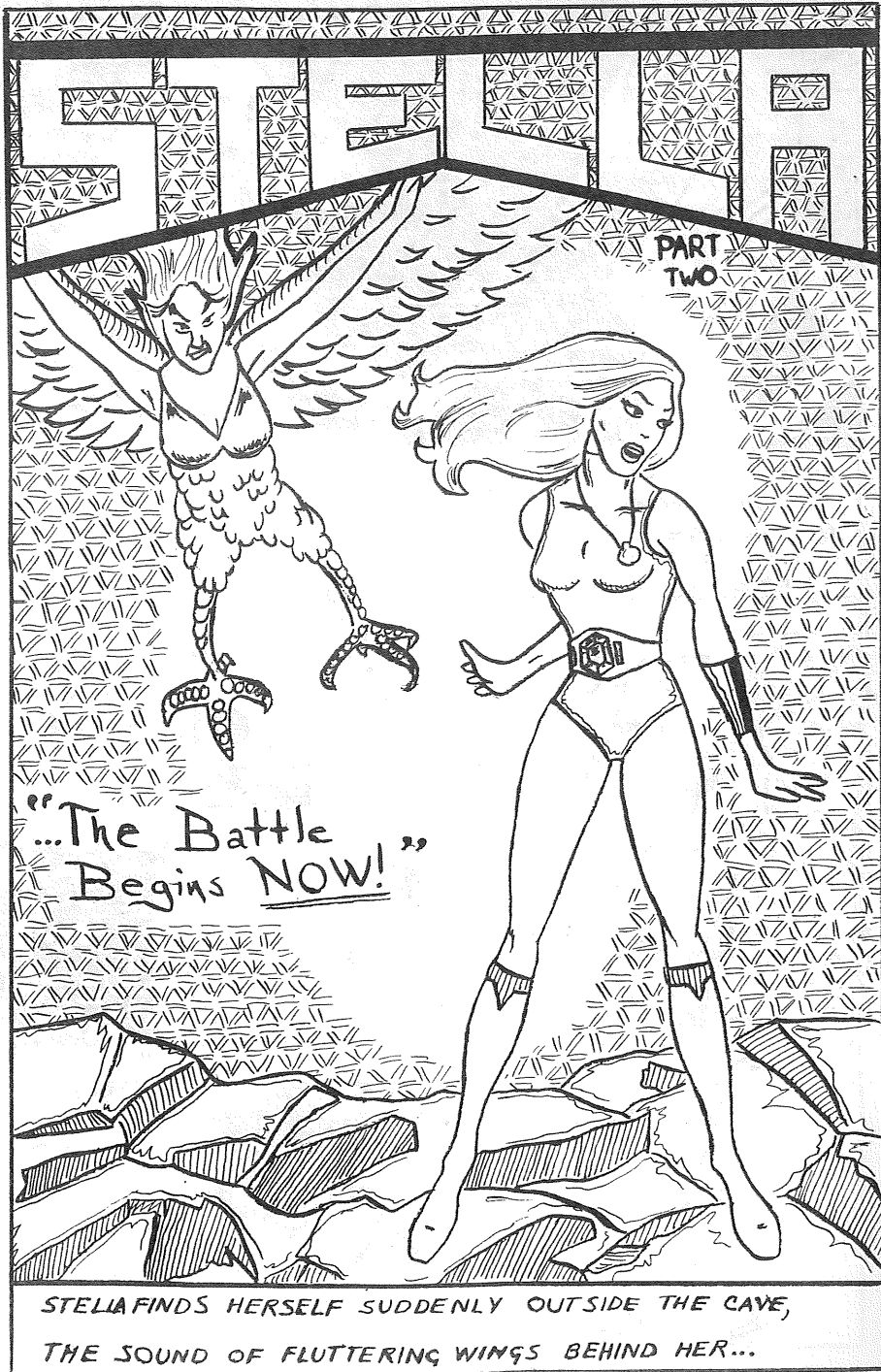
WHERE ARE YOU GOING? WON'T YOU AT LEAST STAY TO TRAIN ME FOR THIS "BATTLE?"



I CANNOT STAY...

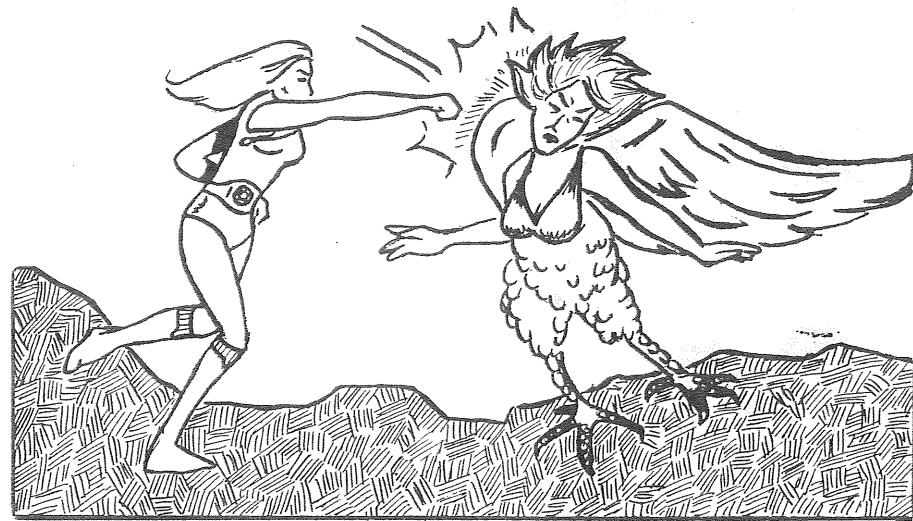


... BECAUSE I NO LONGER EXIST... AND THERE WILL BE NO TRAINING. ZEDE FOUND HER CHAMPION 500 YEARS AGO, AND SO...



STELLAFINDS HERSELF SUDDENLY OUTSIDE THE CAVE,
THE SOUND OF FLUTTERING WINGS BEHIND HER...

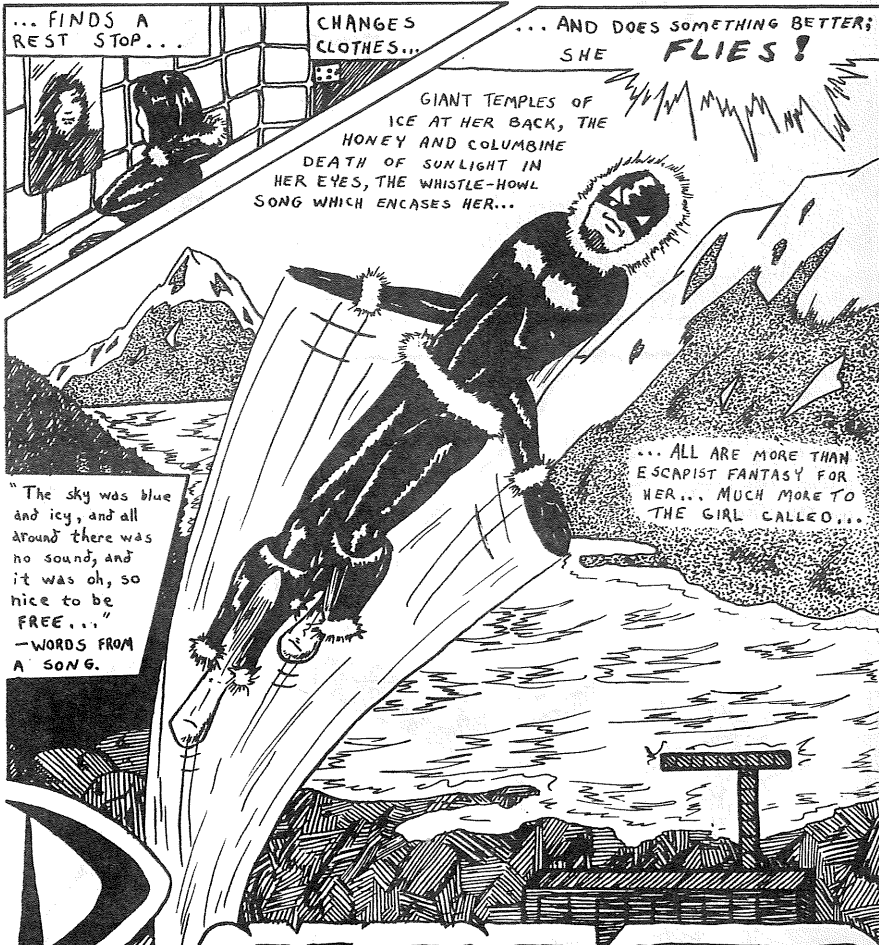
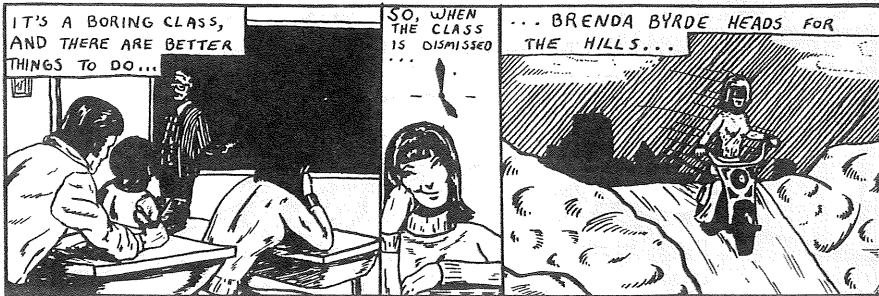
SHE'S BEEN TRAINED IN KUNG FU, KARATE, JIU-JITSU... JUST ABOUT ANY FIGHTING ART IMAGINABLE. WHY, THEN, IN TIMES OF STRESS, DOES SHE RESORT TO PLAIN OLD FISTICUFFS?




BUT, HOW EFFECTIVE ARE FISTICUFFS, OR, FOR THAT MATTER, KUNG FU AGAINST RAZOR SHARP TALONS?



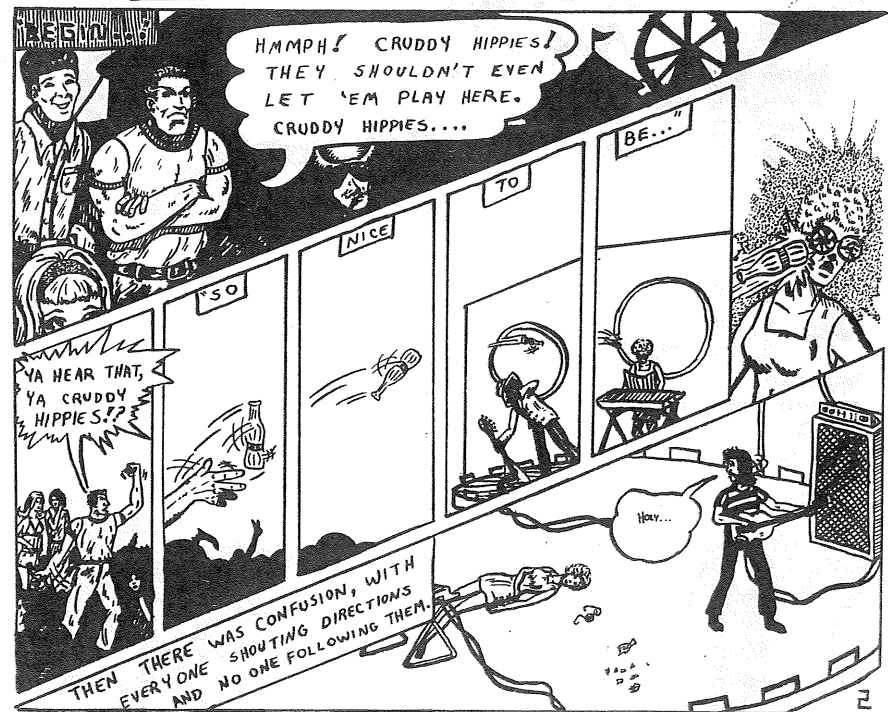
ANSWER: NOT VERY EFFECTIVE.

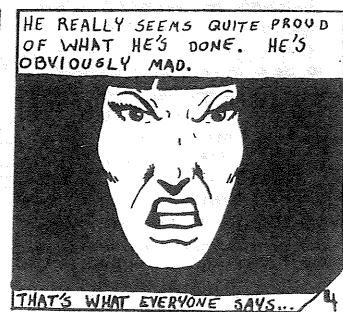
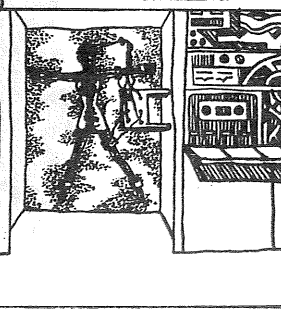
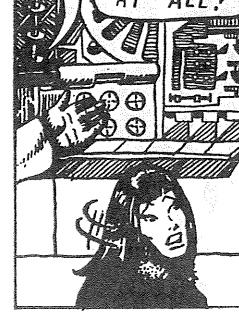
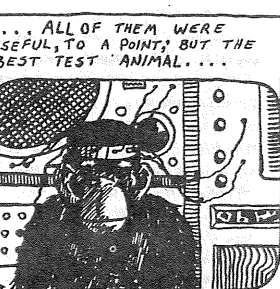
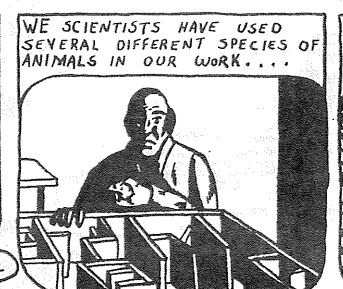
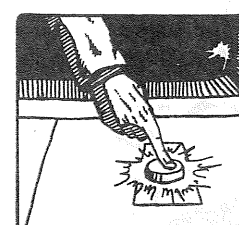
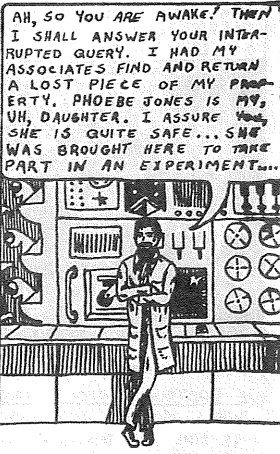
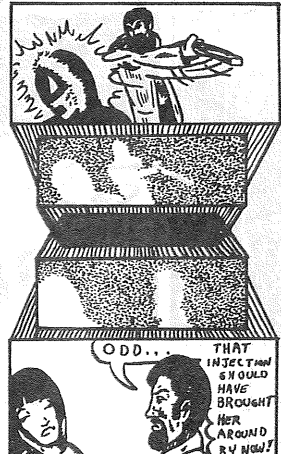
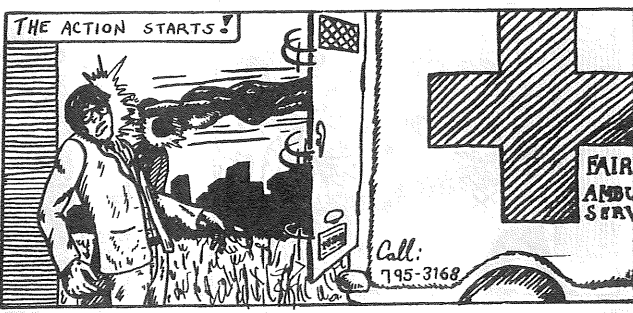
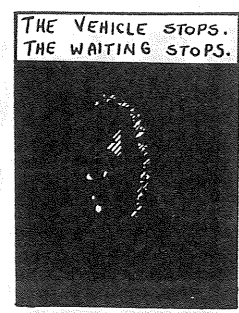
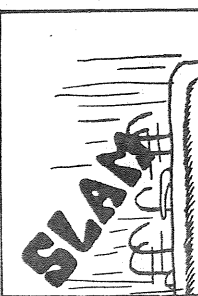
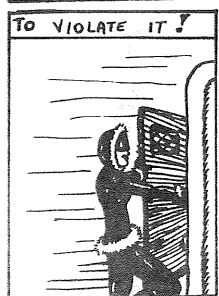
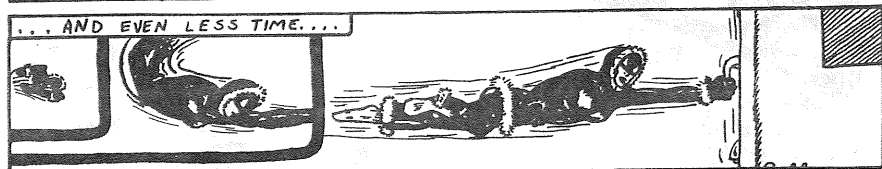
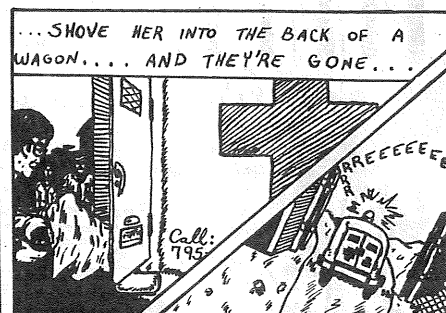
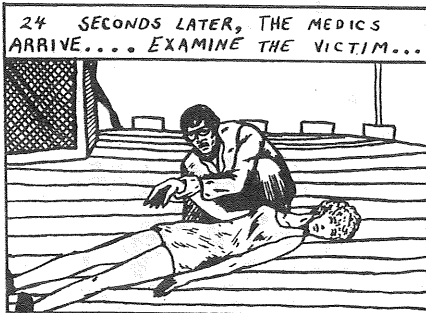


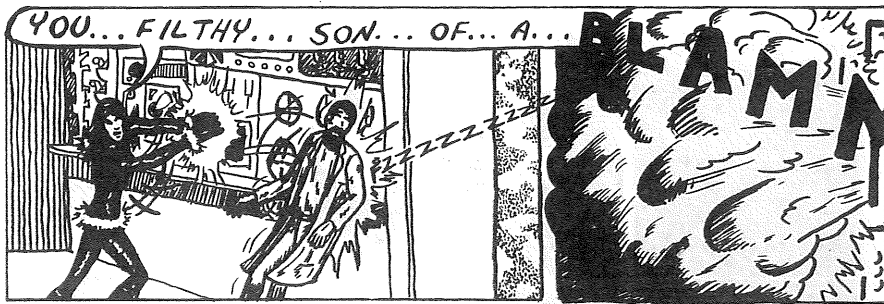
RAVEN

STORY + ART BY

 PRESENTED BY
SFINX

PART I: "the JONES TAPES"



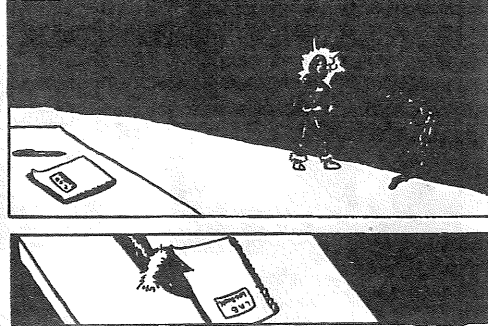




AND WHEN THE SMOKE CLEARS, ALL THAT'S LEFT OF THE MAN IS A SIZZLING HEAP OF...



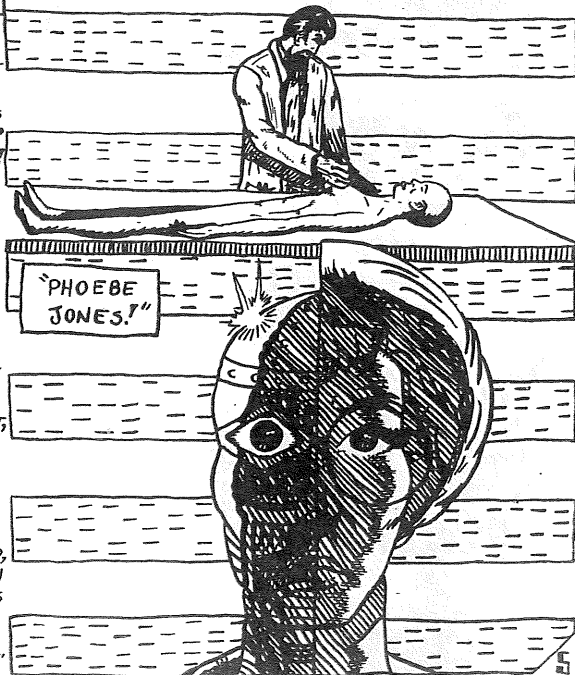
EXPLANATION...?



EXCERPTS FROM THE LOG OF DOCTOR LEOPOLD JONES:

"WHILE MONKEYS AND RABBITS ARE FINE FOR TESTING USES WITH PHYSICAL PROBLEMS, WHAT CAN A PSYCHOLOGIST EMPLOY TO DUPLICATE HUMAN EMOTIONS UNDER LABORATORY CONDITIONS? THERE EXISTS NO SUCH CREATURE! CONSEQUENTLY, I HAVE MADE MY OWN 'GUINEA PIG': A MACHINE WHICH LOOKS, ACTS, AND THINKS EXACTLY LIKE A HUMAN. THE SUBJECT DOES NOT EVEN KNOW THAT IT IS A MACHINE!"

"IT IS MY BELIEF THAT THE ONLY PROPER METHOD OF VERIFYING THE SUBJECT'S 'HUMAN' QUALITIES IS TO RELEASE IT INTO SOCIETY AS A FREE AGENT, TO SEE IF IT CAN FUNCTION ON ITS OWN WITHOUT REVEALING ITS TRUE NATURE. THIS I HAVE DONE. IN EXACTLY FIVE YEARS, THE SUBJECT WILL BE RETRIEVED, AND ALL THE EMOTIONS WHICH HAVE BEEN IMPRESSED ON ITS TAPES EVALUATED BY THE D-40 COMPUTER. THE SUBJECT IS OPERATING UNDER THE NAME..."



IT'S TRUE. I AM A MACHINE.

PHOEBE!

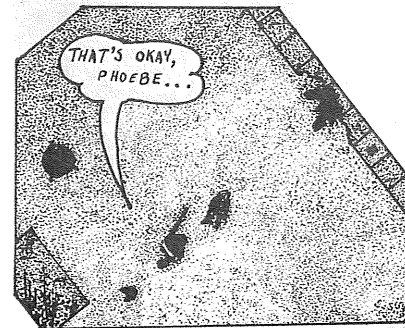
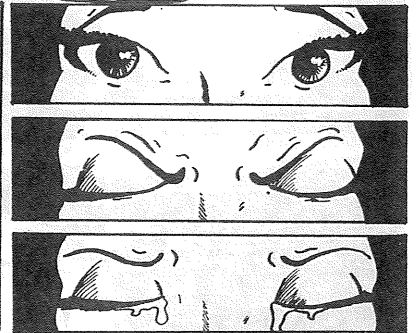
I...

OBVIOUSLY, THE MEDICS AT THE FAIR WERE HIRED BY DR. JONES TO BRING ME HERE. THE ANDROID WHICH YOU DESTROYED INDICATES THAT THE DOCTOR FEARED FOR HIS HEALTH AND BUILT A MECHANICAL DUPLICATE OF HIMSELF. WHEN HE DIED, THE ANDROID CONTINUED HIS WORK.



PHOEBE... YOU SOUND... A-ARE YOU ALRIGHT?

YES, BUT WITH THE REMOVAL OF MY D-40 TAPES, IT APPEARS THAT I HAVE LOST THE ABILITY TO FEEL EMOTION.



THAT'S OKAY, PHOEBE...

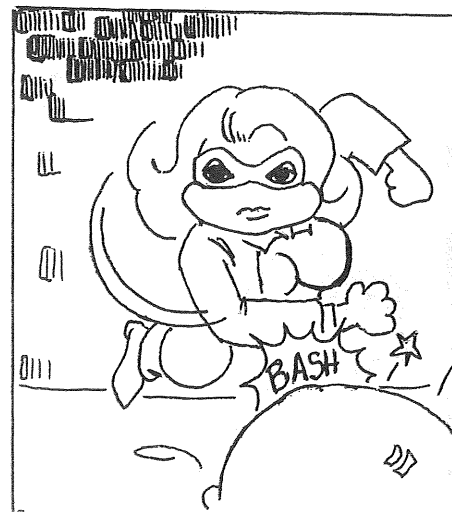
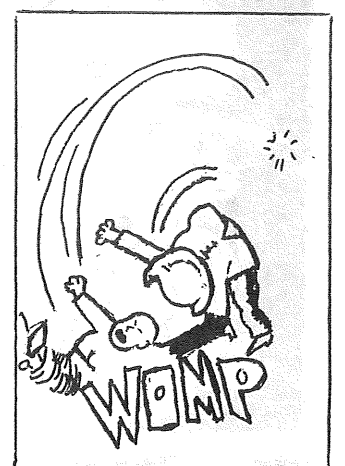
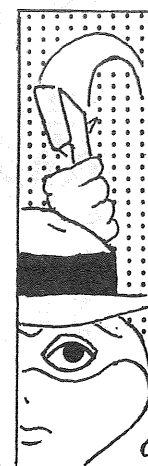
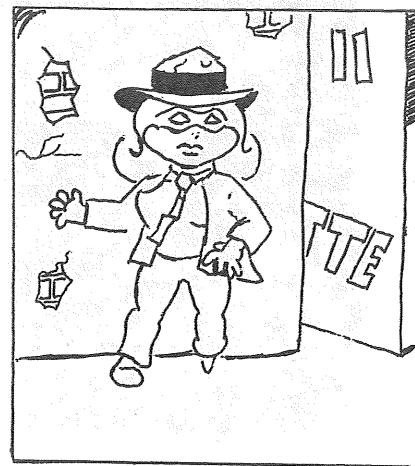
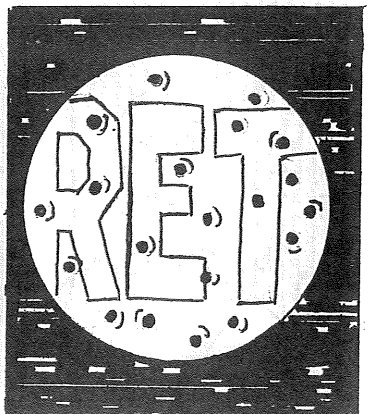
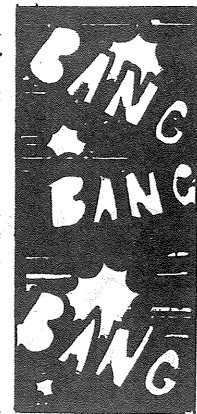
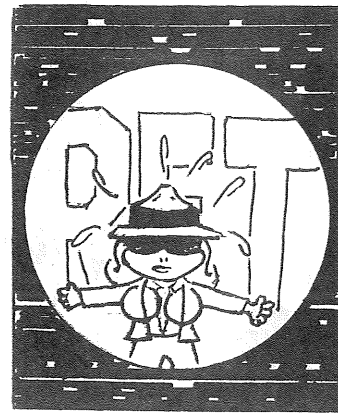
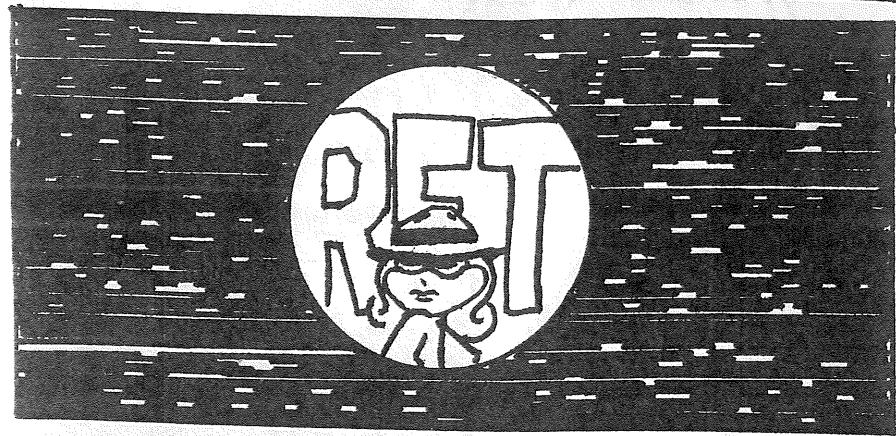
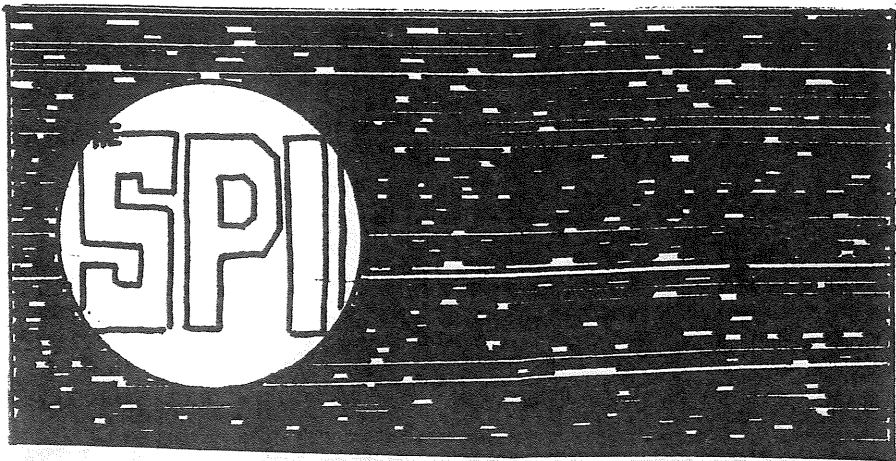


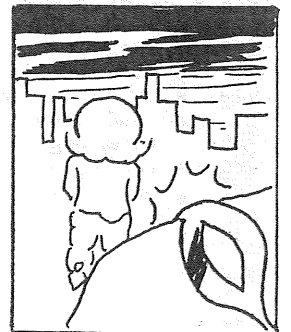
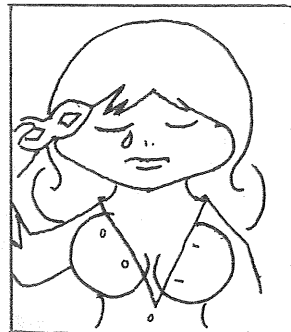
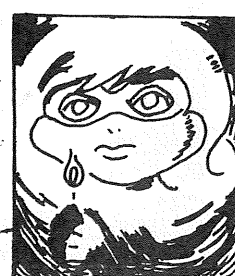
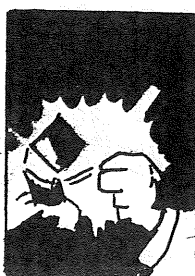
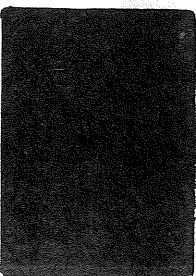
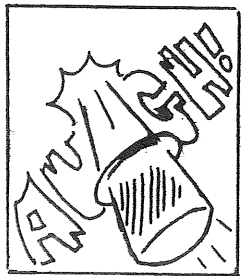
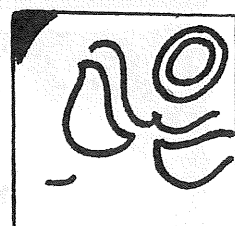
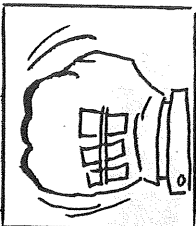
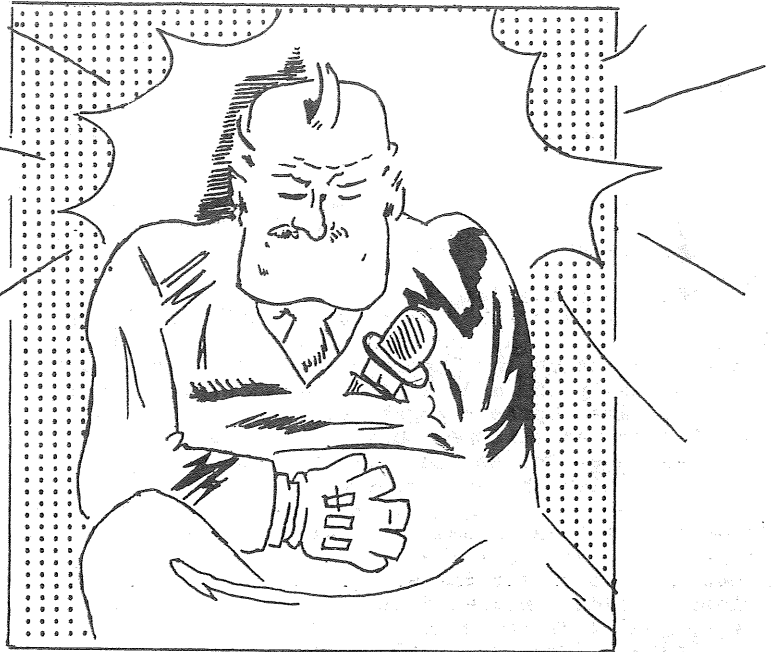
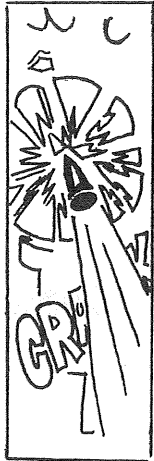
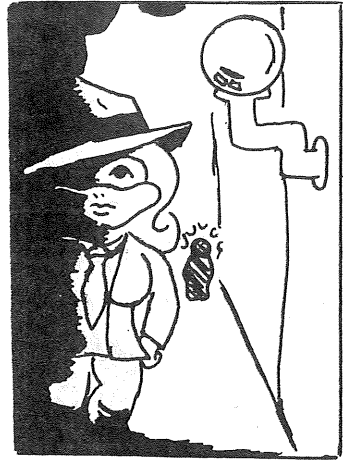
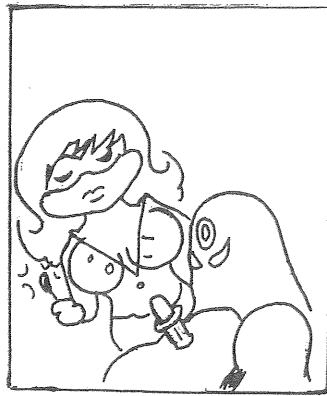
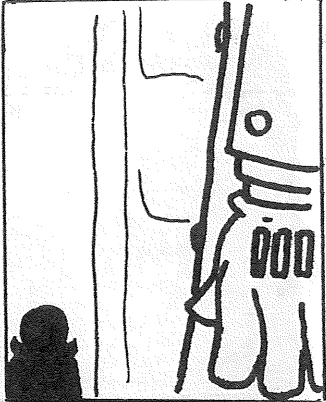
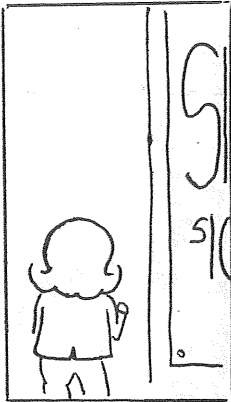
RIGHT NOW, I THINK I'M FEELING ENOUGH FOR THE BOTH OF US...



DEDICATED TO "ATOM AL" TANNER, WITH THANKS.

NEXT: A NEW LIFE FOR PHOEBE JONES! ONE OF THE MOST REVOLUTIONARY COSTUMING CONCEPTS IN THE COMICS REALM! "GENIUS EDDIE" LIVES UP TO HIS NAME! ALL THIS, PLUS THE LADY CALLED **MINDBENDER** REVEALED IN PART 2: "Child's Play" TED DELORME 7506.20





KARLA*, THE GIRL FROM OUTER SPACE

"LITTLE GIRL LOST"

Written and Illustrated by Kirk Hastings

The desert.

Calm. Peaceful. Tranquil.

Then, one day late in July, the desert stillness was suddenly shattered.

Even though it was early morning the desert sun was already blazing mercilessly upon the sands below. It also glinted off the metal hull of a great spacecraft as the red hot alien ship plunged into the atmosphere.

The desert vermin went scurrying for their burrows as the cigar-shaped ship smashed hard onto the desert floor with a thunderous explosion. The ship's nose crumpled into twisted shards as smoke and dust spewed forth from the impact. The vessel skidded along, crushing cacti as it went. Finally it came to a stop. It took a few minutes more for the dust clouds to settle, then stillness returned to the barren landscape.

Inside the strange ship its two-man crew were totally oblivious to their situation. The reason? One was unconscious, having been frozen into suspended animation for the long space voyage.

The other was dead.

The impact of the crash having badly ruptured the freezing tube the man lay in, the astronaut's body could not withstand the sudden change in temperature and pressure. He had died almost instantly the moment his tube had broken open.

The first space voyager was luckier. She was still alive, as her tube had suffered only a fine crack.

Yes, she. The second astronaut was a girl.

Tall, slender, and dressed in a green, tight-fitting space-suit, the lovely young girl lay quietly in her below-zero environment. The pressurized gas that kept her in her sleeplike state hissed as it slowly leaked out through the small crack in the tube. As more of the gas escaped the girl began to stir in her "sleep". Wild, confused dreams began to fill her mind. Dreams of how she had come to be in the space vessel

Years before, the girl remembered, the craft had lifted off from a giant planet orbiting around the double star Alpha Centauri called Sular. The craft was the first of its kind, designed to travel just under the speed of light --- this made the vessel capable of traveling distances far greater than those within Sular's own solar system, in a relatively short period of time. The ship had been perfected none too soon, as Sular's natural resources were beginning to suffer from its advanced civilization. Various fuels and essential minerals needed to keep its society functioning were rapidly becoming scarce. Sular's Government Council (who ruled the entire planet, Sular having united its individual countries into one federation long ago) decided that the only avenue left open to it was space. After launching various robot probes a planet was discovered approximately two light years from Sular that contained almost all the minerals the gi-

ant planet needed to sustain itself. Preparations were made immediately to find qualified astronauts to make the long voyage and survey the mineral-rich world.

The two astronauts finally chosen for the important flight: Gorman, a young man who, besides being a capable astronaut, was also a trained geologist; and Karla, a twenty-year-old girl also trained in geology and space science. Twenty-year-old astronauts were not unusual on Sular, as Sularians become biologically mature at an early age. Due to the planet's advanced technological and social structure sex and race discrimination ceased to exist there long ago; therefore a female astronaut was also commonplace.

Karla stirred again in her freezing tube as images of her ship's liftoff passed through her mind. Giant Sular fading away into a tiny speck in the vastness of space was the last sight she and Gorman saw before their suspended animation tubes became fully functional. But much had happened after that fateful liftoff that Karla and Gorman had not witnessed. Over a year into its proposed two-year flight the ship was sideswiped by a gigantic comet, damaging part of its delicate guidance system. The ship then wobbled off its pre-planned course, headed in a completely different direction, to finally crashland on Earth over three light years later.

The girl's dreams faded as she began to reach a level of consciousness. Almost all of her freezing tube's gas had leaked out. Within moments she was nearly fully conscious, though still groggy after her 4½-year sleep.

The girl surveyed her situation. Though she had not experienced the ship's crash landing, she knew instantly something was wrong. Part of the ship's hull directly in front of her freezing tube was crushed in, making escape from the tube impossible. However, in her state of semi-consciousness, Karla was not aware of the impossibility of her predicament. All she knew was that she was trapped in a small space, and she did not like it. She had to be free.

So saying the girl instinctively battered her glass prison with her fists. Surprisingly, the thick tube immediately shattered into tiny pieces. Thrusting herself forward Karla rammed against the thick metal hull with her body. The hull split apart as the girl stumbled out of the ship onto the desert sand. She fell to one knee, propping herself against a boulder. She remained thus for long minutes, trying to regain her breath and recover her strength. The desert heat was a drastic change from her long frozen sleep.

Many miles away the manager of a large Nevada airport burst into the control room of the Air Traffic Control tower. He immediately walked over to a man sit-



KARLA RAMMED AGAINST THE SHIP'S HULL

ting in front of the tower radar screen.

"All right Collins," he said to the radar man, with a slight tinge of disbelief in his voice. "What's this report about you picking up a --- "UFO" --- on your screen?"

"It's true, sir," the man replied. " --- Just minutes ago. A strange blip appeared on the screen --- looked like some sort of fairly large, cylindrical object, possibly a ship of some sort. It crashlanded in the desert some thirty miles due west of here."

"There's no chance it could have been one of our aircraft?"

"No, sir --- not shaped like that."

The airport manager thought on this for a moment. Then he said: "All right, no sense taking chances. Whether its one of our planes or not, someone had better get out there and find out just what the devil's going on. Tell the switchboard to notify the National Guard to check out this ship. Give them the location where it crashed as accurately as you can."

"Yes, sir."

Back at the disabled spaceship Karla's strength was just beginning to return, as her mind cleared. For the first time she realized just where she was and what had happened. She looked up, staring at the gaping hole she had torn in the ship's hull.

That hull was built to withstand the extreme conditions of outer space, Karla thought to herself. How then did she manage to tear her way out of it with her bare hands? Familiar with the various areas of space science Karla surmised the only possible answer: this planet she had crashed onto (wherever in the universe it was; that she could only guess at) must obviously be much smaller in mass and gravitational strength than giant Sular --- the lesser gravity would account for her sudden, incredible increase in physical strength. But there was no way to find out where she was, since her ship's tracking instruments were no doubt hopeless piles of junk.

Just then the full impact of her situation dawned on the girl. She was stranded here, far away from both her home planet and the planet she had intended to reach. And there was no way to contact her people to tell them what had happened.

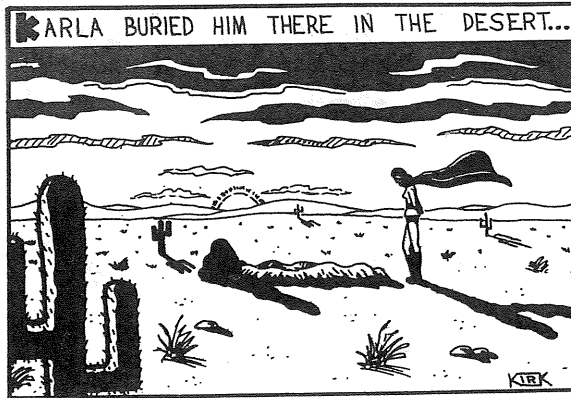
She was totally alone.

Except for one person Gorman!

Spurred on by this realization the girl leaped up and went back over to the spaceship, entering it through the hole she had made in its hull. The interior of the ship

was full of twisted and broken wreckage, but the girl's newfound strength enabled her to rip most of it out of her way. Finally she reached the area where Gorman's freezing tube was. Her heart sank within her when she saw the broken tube and its dead occupant.

She buried Gorman there in the desert, on a strange world millions of miles from their home.



Karla spent the next hour or so salvaging whatever she thought she could use from the wreck --- a hand weapon, a few tools, etc. placing them within a waist-bag attached to her spacesuit belt. When this was done she knelt once more in front of the simple grave she had dug for her dead companion. Then she set off across the burning wasteland. She knew she would have to find food and water

soon, as the ship's supplies had been ruined in the crash. And if there were intelligent beings on this strange, hot planet, she must find them --- before they found her.

At that very moment, less than thirty miles away, a caravan of National Guard troop carriers rumbled across the desert, heading straight for the wrecked spacecraft. Their orders: to determine whether the "UFO" was of terrestrial origin or not. If not --- they were ordered to do whatever the situation demanded

The desert heat beat mercilessly down on the young castaway as she trudged across the flat, sandy waste. She wrapped the insulated cape of her spacesuit around her shoulders, trying to protect herself from the sun's relentless fury. She realized that even her newfound strength and endurance would not last forever against such conditions.

The girl had been walking for what seemed like hours when she spotted something in the distance --- something drifting her way in the hot desert breeze. It continued to tumble toward her, until finally it came within the girl's grasp. She reached out and grabbed it before it could roll past.

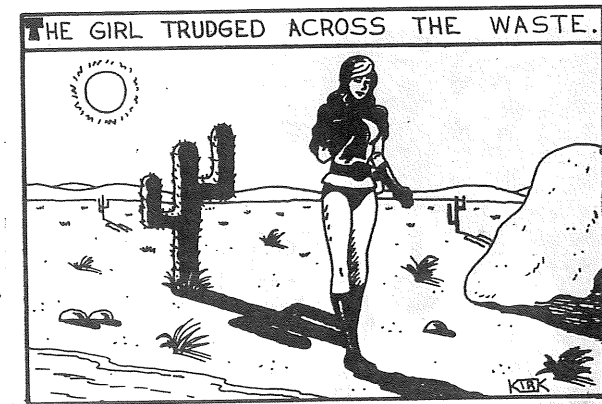
Although the castaway could not recognize it, it was a newspaper. A discarded Nevada newspaper.

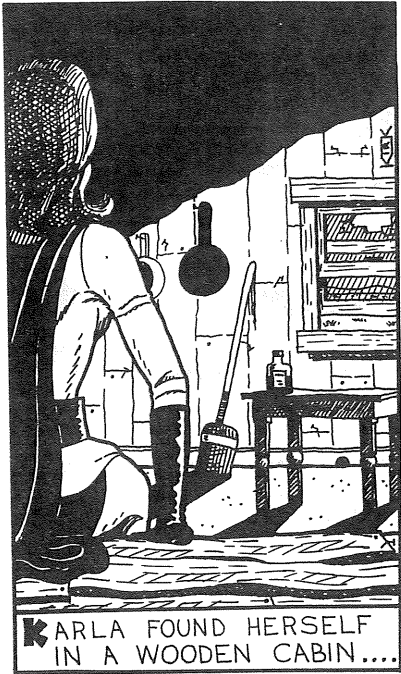
Karla knew instantly that the paper was some sort of communication device; obviously the symbols on it were some type of strange language. Since she was exhausted from walking anyway she decided to sit for a while and study the foreign writing. At least it proved one thing --- there WAS intelligent life on this planet somewhere. Perhaps if she could decipher the unfamiliar language she could learn something about them.

Sitting in the shade of a medium-sized rock Karla began to examine the newspaper intently. Highly intelligent, like most of her people, it was not long before she had deciphered enough of the paper to understand the basic meanings of what it said.

And it was not good.

The paper described war, crime, deceit, and prejudice. Was this the kind of world she had been stranded on? A world of savage, ruthless beings armed with the weapons of an advanced technology? The girl was astonished at the things the paper described discrimination, horror, murder --- conditions which had not existed on Sular for hundreds of years. Karla shuddered when





KARLA FOUND HERSELF IN A WOODEN CABIN....

she thought that she might be marooned on this mad world for the rest of her life.

Presently the girl stood upright, still holding the paper in her hands. Then she let it go, watching it blow away across the sand. Then she turned and began her long trek once again.

The Nevada National Guard had finally come upon the wreckage of the abandoned spaceship. A detailed inspection proved the ship to be deserted; however, the CO of the Guardsmen remained highly suspicious of its origin. It did not appear to him to be any type of experimental craft that perhaps some foreign country had been testing. The strange materials it was constructed of suggested that it very possibly WAS of extraterrestrial origin. And as such, it demanded a thorough going-over by men more learned in such matters than the Guardsmen were. Once they returned to base, the CO thought, they would definitely contact the proper authorities about the ship. The whole matter was no longer their re-

sponsibility.

Only one question kept nagging at the CO's thoughts as the troop made ready to return to base: if the craft WAS an alien spaceship from some unguessed-at world

Where was its crew?

Karla looked toward the hazy horizon, squinting her eyes against the brightness of the noonday sun. Her long, lustrous brown hair blew across her cheeks. She could see no break in the flat, sandy waste. Stifling her gnawing thirst she walked doggedly on.

It was only forty-five minutes later when Karla fell to the ground. Her newfound strength had kept her going much longer than she would have otherwise; but even that could not sustain her any longer. She lay quietly, face down in the sand. A hungry vulture was already circling overhead.

The next time Karla opened her eyes she was once again, for the second time, in unfamiliar surroundings. Waiting for a moment in order to regain her equilibrium, she sat upright. As she did so a wet cloth fell into her lap, from where it had been resting on her forehead. She fingered the cloth as she looked around.

She was in a small, one-room wooden cabin of some sort. The structure was none too sturdy, as its walls creaked and groaned in the breeze. Obviously the cabin's owner was a very simple sort, as the only furnishings about were just the basic necessi-

ties of life --- a wooden bench and table, a small cookstove, a wooden bathtub, and various other meager trappings. Karla found that she was sitting on a loosely-built wooden bed.

But who was the cabin's owner, and where was he? Visions of the people described in the newspaper went through Karla's mind. Could the cabin's owner be one of this planet's savage inhabitants? All appearances pointed to the fact that whoever he was he had tried, and probably succeeded, in saving her life. But for what purpose?

Karla was soon to find out. At that moment the cabin's front door creaked open and a grizzled, earthy old man entered. He was carrying another wet cloth, like the one Karla still held in her hand. Once inside he stopped short, looking at the girl sitting up and staring back at him.

"Well, yer're a hardy young lass, ain't ya?" the old man said, turning to shut the door behind him. "I didn't figger on you wakin' up fer at least a couple hours yet." He turned back toward the

girl, holding the wet cloth out to her. " --- I jest went out to the pump to freshen this fer ya," he said.

At first Karla made no effort to accept the cloth. She kept remembering the newspaper, and its graphic descriptions of earth people. Yet somehow she could not believe that this man was dangerous. And her feelings about people, whether Earthling or Sularian, were often correct. After a moment she reached out and took the cloth from the old man, pressing it against her brow.

"That's a good lass," the man said, smiling. " --- Don't be afraid of old Chester --- I wouldn't hurt ya."

At this the old man pulled his rickety chair over to her and sat down. The two looked at each other in silence.

"What in tarnation were ya doin', trampin' around out there in the desert with no food er water? Ya tryin' ta kill yerself er somethin'?" the old man asked. Looking down at Karla's spacesuit he added: "And I know young people are dressin' kinda funny these days, but what the devil is that thing yer're wearin'?"

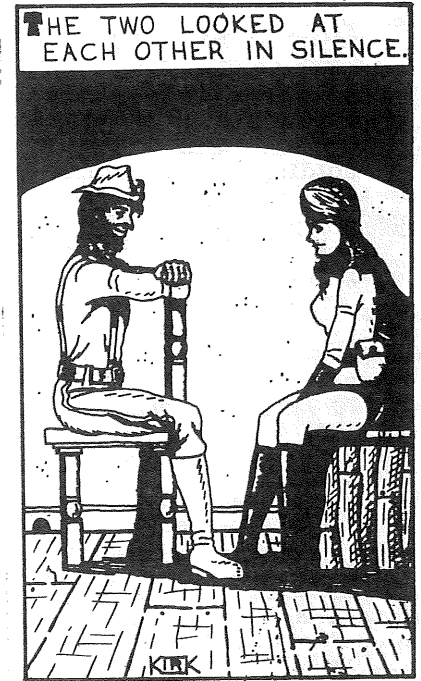
Karla shook her head and made a gesture with her free hand, trying to convey to the old man that she could not understand him. Even though the newspaper had taught her roughly how to read English, she still did not know how to speak it.

"What's the matter?" the old man said, puzzled. "Don't ya unnerstand me? You some kinda foreigner or somethin'?"

Karla shook her head again. She wanted to communicate with the old man.

Suddenly she thought of a way to do just that.

Looking straight at the man Karla made motions with her hands as if she was writing on something.



THE TWO LOOKED AT EACH OTHER IN SILENCE.

"Write?" the old man said, grasping her meaning. "Ya want somethin' ta write on?"

Karla repeated the gesture.

"Okay, hold on jest a minute," the old man said as he got up from his chair. He went over to his table and opened its single drawer, where he began to dig around. "I've got a pencil and some scraps of paper in here somewheres," he said to no one in particular. Then: "Aha! Here they be!"

Holding a short stubby pencil and some pieces of wrinkled but still usable paper the old man handed them both to Karla. She immediately began to write something, after which she handed one of the pieces of paper back to the old man. He stared at it for a moment.

"MY NAME IS KARLA. I CAN WRITE YOUR LANGUAGE, BUT I CANNOT SPEAK IT," the old man read aloud. He looked up at the girl. "Ya can write English, but ya can't speak it? If'n that ain't the durndest thing I ever heard ---"

Karla wrote again, again handing the paper to the old man.

"I AM FROM A PLACE FAR AWAY. WHY DID YOU HELP ME?" the old man read. " --- I knew you was a foreigner!" he exclaimed. He then wrote on the paper's other side: "I HELPED YOU BECAUSE YOU NEEDED HELP."

Karla read this, then looked up and smiled.

"That's better!" the old man said. "Yer're quite a perty young lass when you smile, ya know that?"

Karla did not understand that, of course, but she knew it was something good, and she smiled again. Then she proceeded to write down some of what she had read in the newspaper she had found, and asked if all earth people were like those the paper described. At receiving this note the old man laughed aloud.

"Fer such a smart girl ya sure don't seem to know much about people and things!" he said. He then wrote a response that read like this:

"DON'T BELIEVE EVERYTHING YOU READ IN NEWSPAPERS, KARLA --- THEIR ONLY REASON FOR BEING IS TO REPORT BAD NEWS. DON'T ASK ME WHY. BUT MOST PEOPLE AIN'T LIKE THAT AT ALL. SOME MAY SAY I DON'T KNOW MUCH ABOUT PEOPLE, LIVING OUT IN THE DESERT AND ALL LIKE I DO, BUT THAT AIN'T TRUE. I LIVE IN THE DESERT ONLY BECAUSE I LIKE IT HERE. I SPENT MOST OF MY LIFE LIVING AROUND PEOPLE OF ALL KINDS. AND I FOUND OUT THAT JUST BECAUSE SOME PEOPLE DON'T TURN OUT EXACTLY RIGHT, THAT DON'T MEAN THE REST AIN'T ANY GOOD."

Karla read this intently, then the old man added to it:

"YOU JUST KEEP BELIEVING THERE'S LOTS OF GOOD PEOPLE IN THIS OLD WORLD. AND JUST BECAUSE THERE'S SOME THAT TURN OUT BAD DON'T MEAN WE SHOULDN'T TRY TO HELP THEM BECOME GOOD, TOO."

After reading this Karla looked up at the old man, then



KARLA REMOVED GREAT BOULDERS FROM THE OLD MAN'S GARDEN PLOT.

reached out her hand and put it on the man's shoulder, smiling warmly. She nodded her head in agreement.

"Now ya got it!" the old man said, patting her hand.

For the next few days Karla remained with the old man, learning many things from him. The old man attempted to teach the girl how to speak English using some books he possessed as guides, since his own speech was sadly lacking. Karla astonished him with the rapidity with which she learned. In only days of studying, combined with what she already knew about written English, Karla had already achieved a fairly complete vocabulary. Once she had done this the two had many conversations about Earth and its people, though Karla would not give any details about where she had come from; a decision the old man respected. He told her many things, such as how honor, kindness, and justice existed on Earth side-by-side with discrimination, deceit, and war.

Karla's great strength returned also, and she tried to repay the old man for his kindness by doing some of his chores. This pleased him, but he was certainly shocked when Karla removed some of the huge boulders from his garden plot by heaving them away with her bare hands!

But finally Karla decided it was time for her to leave. Since she was no doubt fated to be marooned on Earth for the rest of her life she felt she must make contact with human society, to learn more about it and possibly use her newfound strength to help it in whatever way she could. But she also decided that no one should ever know that she came from another planet. Somehow she would have to adopt some kind of disguise so that she could live among earth people without them knowing what she was

The early morning sun was already becoming hot as Karla prepared to take her leave. The old man had provided her with food and water for her journey to the closest town, only a few miles away.

"I'm gonna miss ya, lass," he said. "Though there be many things about ya I don't quite understand, I do know you've got a good heart. And ya make good company, somethin' I don't get very often out here."

Karla smiled. "I'll miss you too, Chester --- I promise that one day I'll return to visit you again. You've been of great help and taught me a great deal."

"Tarnation! --- I didn't do that much. You learn so blasted fast ya had them books memorized before I even had a chance to explain 'em to ya!"

Karla laughed. Then she looked up at the blazing sun, climbing higher and higher in the sky. It was time to go.

She gave the old man a last goodbye, squeezing his hand as she did so. "This is for your kindness," she said, placing something she had taken from her waistbag into the old man's hand. "It's very common where I come from, but perhaps you can make some use of it." Then she turned and started off across the desert, her long black cape billowing in the breeze.

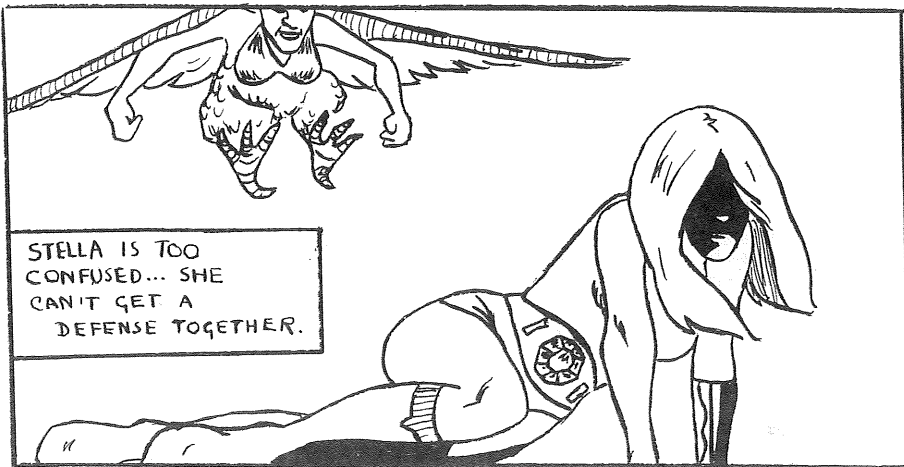
The old man continued to watch her, until she faded away into the hazy distance. Then he looked down to find out what it was the girl had placed in his hand.

"Tarnation!" he exclaimed.

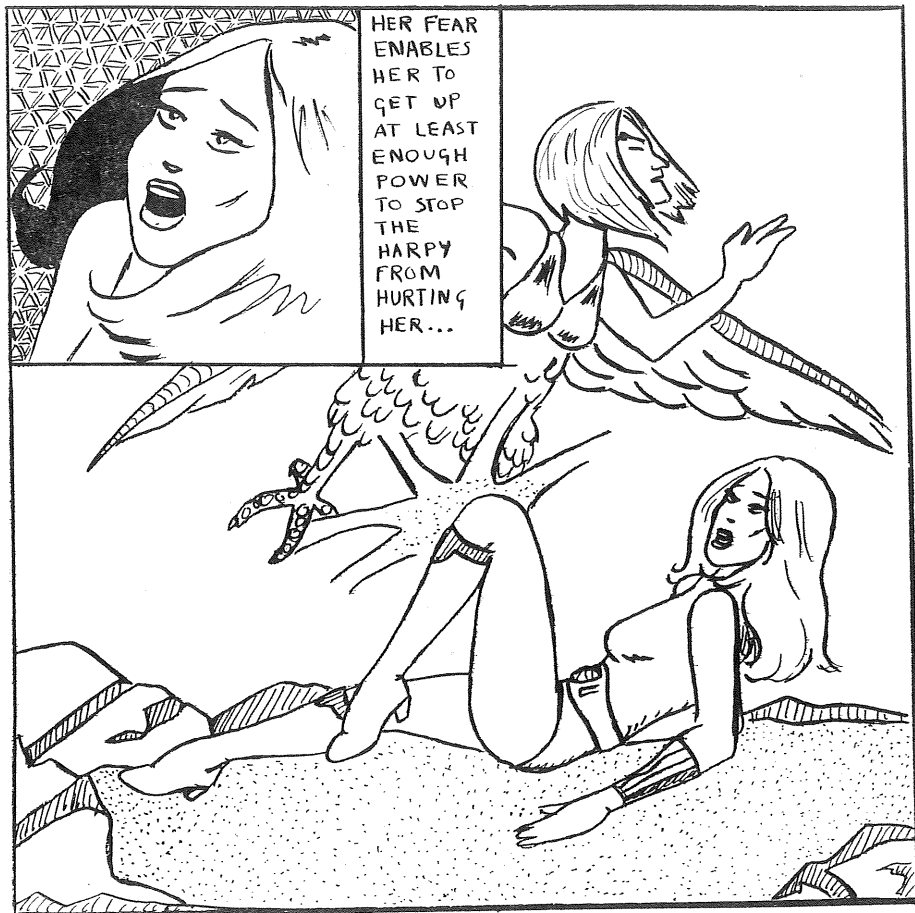
Resting in his hand was a large, shiny chunk of solid gold.

*

*WHAT BECOMES OF KARLA AFTER HER INTRODUCTION TO HUMAN SOCIETY, AND HER SUBSEQUENT DECISION TO USE HER GREAT STRENGTH FOR THE BENEFIT OF MANKIND, WILL BE TOLD IN A FUTURE ADVENTURE.

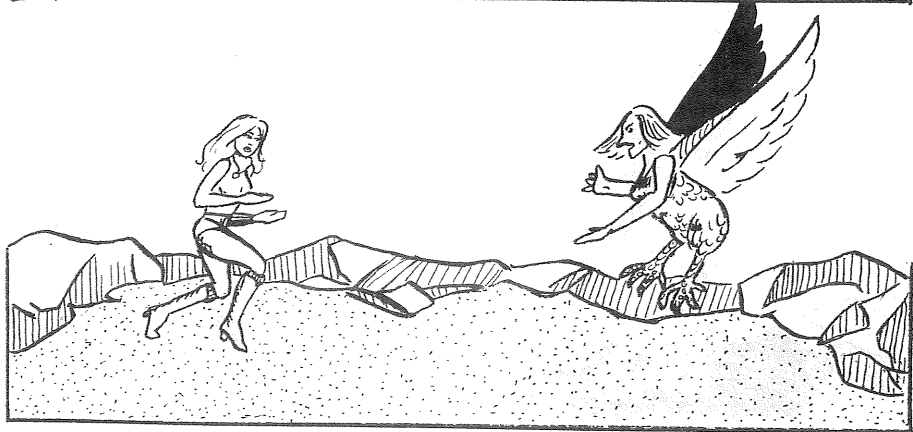


STELLA IS TOO CONFUSED... SHE CAN'T GET A DEFENSE TOGETHER.



HER FEAR ENABLES HER TO GET UP AT LEAST ENOUGH POWER TO STOP THE HARPY FROM HURTING HER...

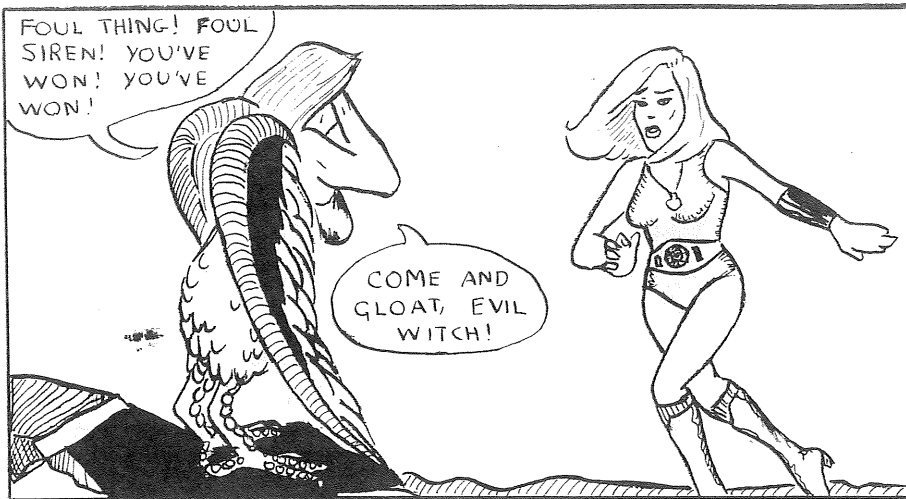
STELLA'S CHANCE COMES... THE HARPY FUMBLES, AND THE SIREN HAS TIME TO RECOVER. NOW, THE TWO FOES FACE EACH OTHER...



HAVING HAD TIME TO THINK, STELLA RECALLS SONA'S WORDS... AND SHE OPENS HER MOUTH... AND...



THE HARPY CANNOT RESIST...

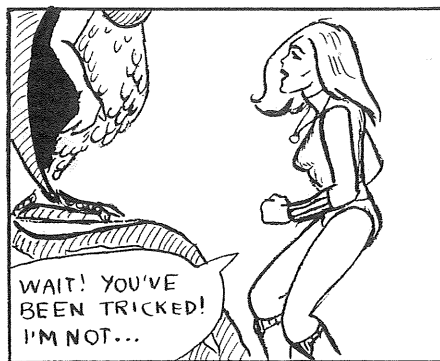


FOUL THING! FOUL SIREN! YOU'VE WON! YOU'VE WON!

COME AND GLOAT, EVIL WITCH!



BUT YOU WON'T TORTURE ME! YOU CAN SPREAD YOUR SIREN-EVIL ALL OVER THIS PLANET... EVEN DESTROY IT AND IT'S INNOCENT PEOPLE! BUT I WON'T BE AROUND TO WATCH! I WON'T GIVE YOU THAT SATISFACTION!

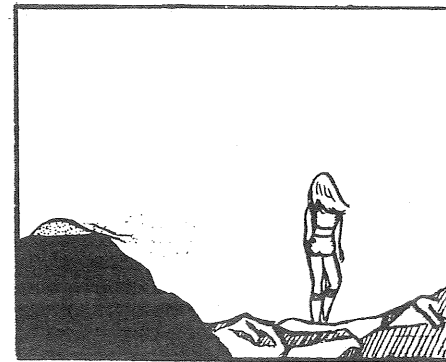


WAIT! YOU'VE BEEN TRICKED! I'M NOT...



...EVIL...

POOF



LATER, AT CAMP, BEV PACKS...



STEPHEN!

BACK AT LAST! I'LL BE READY TO GO AS SOON AS I PACK A FEW... SOUVENIRS...

TAKE YOUR TIME, BEV... THERE'S NO BIG RUSH.



HEY!! WHAT IS THAT BRACE-LET YOU'VE GOT ON?

NOTHING...

COME ON, BEV... I DEMAND TO KNOW WHERE YOU GOT IT!



STEPHEN! IT'S NOTHING!

... nothing... oh...



WELL, THEN, LET'S GET A MOVE ON! THE CHOPPER'S ON ITS WAY TO PICK US UP!

