

# the Adventures of G.I. JOE

V. 3



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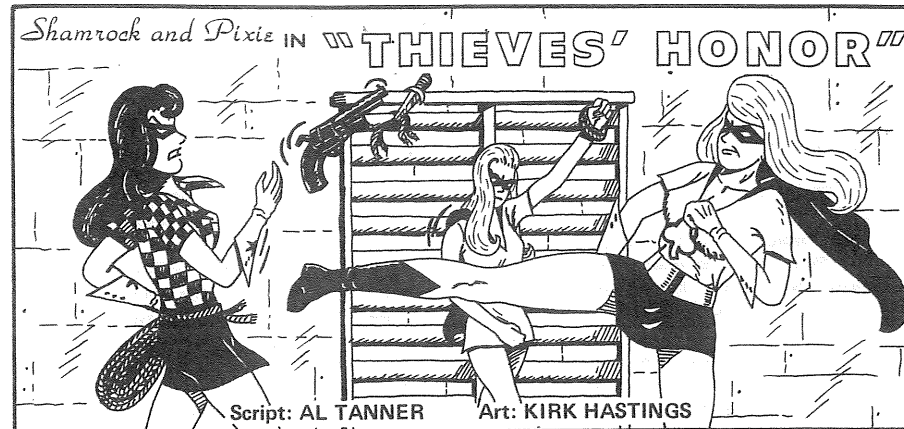
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"Are you looking for someone, Miss Heather?"

"Yes. I want to talk to Bonnie. Do you know where she is, Victor?"

"She was out in the yard with that boy Jimmy. They were throwing a football around. Have you noticed how often he's come over to see her this month? He never used to do that. And every time, they end up playing football or something."

Heather Donovan smiled. "Well, as the saying goes, that's the name of the game."

"Football?...Yes. Of course."

"No, that's not exactly what I meant."

"Oh, I see what you had in mind." The Donovans' only servant was a couple of generations removed from young Bonnie, but although he sometimes found her motivations inexplicable, his medical background had made him a keen observer nevertheless. "The boys are beginning to take an interest in Miss Bonnie aren't they?"

"You might say that," Heather chuckled.

"But she says she doesn't like boys."

"She says a lot of things," Heather said pointedly. "I think I went through that phase too when I was her age. In some ways I didn't really know myself. I didn't really understand my own feelings about certain kinds of things."

Victor nodded. "And yet she has this...this ESP which allows her to sense the feelings of other people to such an unusual degree. It's ironic."

"I suppose so. I never thought about it that way....But I'm not sure it's really ESP. She isn't actually aware of people's thoughts as such."

Victor was obviously interested. "How does it work? Neither of you has ever really told me....Of course, maybe you don't want me aware. I know you two have kept it a complete secret from everyone else, even your grandmother. If you'd rather I didn't..."

"No, we want you to know, Victor, just like we want you to be the one person who knows about our secret identities as Shamrock and Pixie. There may come a time when it's vital that someone here in the household knows these things. Grandmother, being the kind of person she is, would worry herself to death if she knew about our dual lives, so it's important that you do know."

"I'm glad you feel that way, Miss Heather. It allows me to help you in any ways that I can."

"Bonnie doesn't really understand just how her ESP - or whatever it is - works herself. All she knows is that when she makes her mind a blank and thinks about nothing at all, she sometimes gets a kind of mental impression of a person's attitude or feelings, especially where emotions are involved. Once in a while it even goes beyond that and she seems to see a vague picture

which is created somehow by the person's mind."

"That's fascinating," said Victor thoughtfully. "Does she get these impressions often?"

"No, only when she has the opportunity to make her mind...Well, it's like putting herself into sort of a trance I think. As active as she is, she doesn't do *that* very often."

"It's probably very wise of her not to let anyone know about her ESP. That's an uncanny phenomenon though, isn't it? Pixie is certainly an appropriate name for her," Victor mused.

"Yes, that's one reason for the name," smiled Heather. "But our mother always called her Pixie as a nickname because she was so cute and lively."

"If your mother were alive, I'm sure she'd still call her that."

The back door burst open and the subject of their conversation came in to join them. She was carrying an intermediate-size football and wearing a old shirt, tight jeans, and a scowl of annoyance.

"Oh, there you are, Bonnie. I was about to come looking for you. We have some planning to do. Where's Jimmy?"

"He went home," the little blonde ballcarrier said dryly. "I tackled him - just to show him he wasn't as fast as he thought he was - and I think he got hurt. He wouldn't admit it though. He said he had to be home soon." She frowned and rolled her blue eyes skyward in cynical judgment.

"You don't need any medical attention do you?" Victor inquired.

"Of course not. I'm fine."

"Well, with the dirt and grass stains on your clothes, I was just wondering," he explained, realizing that she had been annoyed by his question. "Of course no one plays football and stays clean."

"That's right," Bonnie agreed. "And the better you are, the dirtier you're going to get."

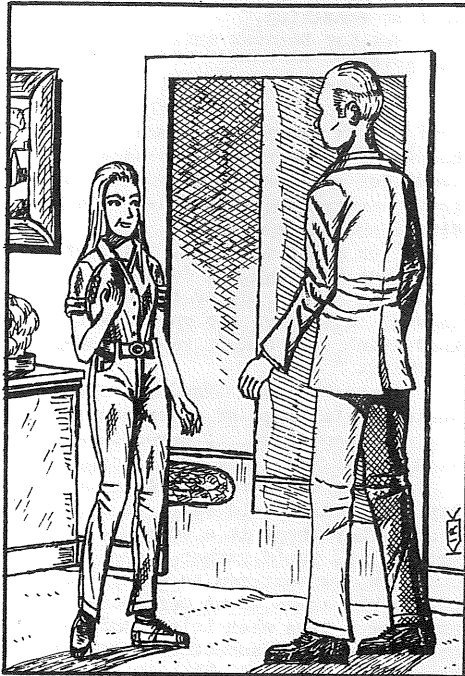
Heather winked at Victor and commented, "She'll be doing other things with boys than playing football when she gets a little older."

"I will not!" Bonnie snapped. "And besides, that's *my* business, not *yours*!" She threw the football sharply at her sister, who reacted instantly enough not only to protect herself, but to make a nifty catch. The Donovans were all exceptional athletes. Their mother had been an amateur champion in two sports, and the girls still proudly displayed her trophies on the same shelves as their own.

Heather looked squarely into Bonnie's eyes but controlled her temper. "Don't give me any of *that* stuff," she said firmly. "And now that you mention *business*, that's exactly what I wanted to talk to you about. It looks as if Shamrock and Pixie are going to *have* a little business to attend to this afternoon."

Bonnie's pouting expression was instantly replaced by a smile of happy anticipation. "Good! I'll wear my new costume. I'm glad we got it finished last night. Are we going after Lasso Lass and her gang?"

"Yes, I think it's time. They stole a whole collection of valuable paintings last night, more than a half-million dollars worth."



"I saw that in the paper this morning," Victor said. "They made a clean escape from the museum. Lasso Lass is clever all right. But I wonder if she realizes how difficult it is to dispose of well-known original paintings."

"She's smart enough to know that," Heather replied. "I'm sure she'll hide them away for a long time before she tries to sell them, even through a sharp fence. But I think maybe we can find the place she's using to store them away. Right, Pixie?"

"I hope so," nodded Bonnie, pulling her flowing hair back over her left shoulder.

"Well, you say the mental picture you picked up from Eddie was of a place with a huge, towering wall. If your picture was accurate, it could only mean that their new hide-out was going to be either at one of the places along the river where the bank rises straight up as a high cliff - and that isn't likely because there's not much room at the base of those cliffs - or that abandoned quarry way out on Springfield Road. I know this whole area pretty well, and I don't know of any other place that would involve what you pictured as a huge wall."

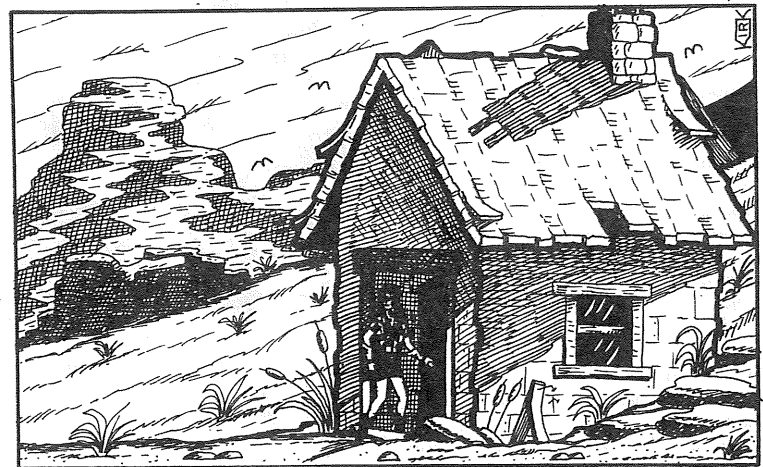
"I could be wrong," Bonnie admitted, "but that's the image I saw while Eddie had me tied up on the bed, and I'm pretty sure it came from his mind as he thought about the place they were planning to meet later. I saw sky above the wall, and that means it should be someplace outdoors."

"When we checked the old quarry the next day, it looked like it would make a perfect hide-out. It's certainly an isolated spot; no one lives anywhere near there. Of course, they hadn't gone there yet, but my guess is that it's where they've taken the paintings by now. So we'll go out there this afternoon. We can start at the old wooden shack that they left standing when they abandoned work on the quarry years ago."

"Be careful though," urged Victor. "From what you told me about your first encounter with her, Lasso Lass has already proven to be a dangerous foe."

"Don't worry, we know what we're up against," Heather assured him.

Her young partner-in-crime-busting obviously concurred. "Yes," she acknowledged, "but we have a score to settle with that bunch...and I'm all ready to *do* it!" She glowed with youthful confidence.



From their place of concealment, they watched the disarmingly-attractive and briefly-attired figure of Lasso Lass warily approach and enter the crude wooden shack. "Let's get closer," Shamrock decided. "I want to see what's in there. The pair crept up to the shack's single window and peeped in. They saw Lasso Lass and her lieutenant, an expert knife-thrower whom they knew as Bronco, looking intently at a map spread out on a small table."

For a few minutes they talked too quietly for the eavesdroppers to overhear, and then Bronco turned and spoke to two members of the gang who had been languishing against the far wall. "Okay, you guys, let's get back to the cave."

"Right," said one of them. "I want to get back in that poker game. The least I can do is pick up some extra cash if we got t' live in that damn cave with nuthin' but sleeping bags and a tent stove."

"I told y'all t' quit complaining," drawled Lasso Lass. "Any time y' ain't happy with the money I'm givin' y', jes' say so." The three started out the door. "Bronco, be careful with that job y' gotta do for me."

"Don't worry about that, boss. I'll take care of it," Bronco replied.

"I'll follow them and check on the cave they're talking about," said Shamrock quietly. "That must be where they have the paintings hidden. You stay here and keep an eye on Lasso Lass."

"Sure," Pixie agreed. She watched her sister disappear around the corner of the shack and settled down to wait for her return. She removed a piece of bubble gum from one of the hidden pockets in her cape and started to unwrap it, then changed her mind when she saw Lasso Lass head for the door. She slid along the wall to the front corner of the shack, from where she saw the raven-haired crime mistress walk away in the opposite direction.

Deciding to take advantage of the unexpected opportunity, Pixie quickly entered the shack for an inspection of the map on the table. She found it to be a detailed map of the entire area, with lines and arrows drawn on it in red ink which she knew Shamrock would find very interesting. Just as she started to study them more closely, she heard a slight sound behind her, and thus was not entirely unprepared when Lasso Lass's arm suddenly grabbed her around the throat.

Pixie's right elbow thudded into her assailant's side under her arm, and Lasso Lass grunted in pain and released her grip. Pixie adroitly twisted around, secured a long-practiced judo grip, and applied the perfect leverage to send her larger opponent flying across her hip and onto the floor.

The diminutive blonde started for the open door, but a diving lunge tripped her up almost immediately. She had not expected Lasso Lass to be quite so fast.

The two battled furiously on the floor, rolling over several times as fists, knees, and elbows landed with jarring impact. Both took the punishment amazingly well, and with the older Lasso Lass's strength being largely offset by Pixie's quickness and training, neither could gain a clearcut advantage.

Pixie squirmed out of an arm-lock and managed to apply a partial choke hold which had Lasso Lass gasping for breath. "Give up!" she demanded. Lasso Lass rolled forward, however, and Pixie was too light to hold her down.

The battle went on unabated, with neither girl conceding. Finally the Texan's greater strength enabled her to gain the upper hand though. Holding Pixie on her back on the floor, she sat astride her shoulders and pinned them with her legs. She managed to capture her wrists and hold them down with her hands. Adjusting her weight and balance, she seemed satisfied.



Even now, Pixie didn't give up. She tried to roll in each direction, but her shoulders remained pinned firmly. She squirmed and twisted, but to no avail.

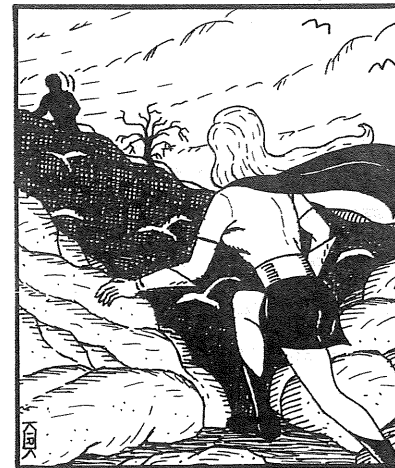
Lasso Lass knew she had won. "You're quite a li'l scrapper," she smiled. "Next time I reckon I won't take you to be so easy."

Glaring up at her defiantly, Pixie struggled desperately, but she was inescapably pinned, and finally she ceased squirming and lay still. Her teeth remained obstinately clenched, but her eyes bitterly acknowledged defeat.

Her heavier opponent relaxed now and grinned smugly. "I sure ain't gonna trust you loose; not after what y' got away with that las' time. I'll jus' hold y' down like *this* 'til Bronco gets back. He can give me a hand with yuh."

Pixie seemed to be paying no attention whatever. In fact, her eyes were closed, her face absolutely expressionless now.

Shamrock had quietly followed Bronco as he approached close to the high quarry wall. He turned left and within a few yards came to the bottom of a rough trail which wound upward in barely ascensible fashion. Glancing around nervously, apparently wanting no one to be aware of his mission, he made his way upward, trailed at a cautious distance by the nimble Shamrock.



She had never inspected the ground above the quarry at this spot, and had no idea what to expect. Bronco had rather obviously made the climb before, however, for he followed the least difficult course at every turn with little hesitation.

Reaching the top of the wall, he went to an electronic device of some sort which sat on the ground. He knelt beside it and picked up the end of a cable. Shamrock, concealed behind some rocks nearby, could see that the cable led to the edge of the wall they had climbed, and she surmised that it continued down the face of the wall.

She watched as Bronco plugged the cable carefully into a socket in the device. Now that he was out of sight of the quarry bed below, he felt safe from observation and his attention was riveted on his task. Shamrock crept closer to get a

better look at the metal device. It had a plunger-type handle attached, and by now she was certain that it was an electric detonator. She wondered what purpose it was intended to serve.

Abruptly Bronco stood up and turned in her direction. She ducked out of



sight quickly. She had no desire to make her presence known as yet.

Followed again by his green-and-white-clad shadow, he descended to the rock-strewn quarry floor and proceeded to the narrow mouth of a cave. Stooping slightly, he entered. Shamrock picked out a suitable spot nearby to which she could retreat and hide if he returned; then she moved to the edge of the cave mouth and listened.

From the hollow sound of Bronco's base voice she could tell that he had gone a considerable distance inside. He spoke loudly, as if addressing someone still further in.

"Eddie! Come on! I gotta job for yuh to do!"

"In a minute. We got a big pot goin' here," came an annoyed reply.

"Now!" Bronco commanded. "The hell with your pot! Get out here!"

Warned by the sounds of approaching footsteps and subdued grumbling, Shamrock slipped away to concealment. The two mobsters emerged from the cave and walked off in the direction of the old shack. After making sure that was indeed their objective, she decided to return to the cave and make an inspection. Pixie could keep an eye on the shack until she rejoined her there. In the meantime, she wanted to check out a hunch.

The plank door swung open and revealed a dismaying surprise. "Oh, no!" grunted Bronco. "It's that sneaky little..."

"Pixie!" Eddie finished. "How the hell did she get here?"

"Ah reckon that's one o' th' things we wanta find out," Lasso Lass drawled. "She ain't been real talkative so far, but we'll get sumptin' out of her now! I'll let her up now that you two are here." She stood up, rubbing the muscles in her legs, which had become stiff while she sat in position astride Pixie. "Gimme your gun, Eddie. Then get some ropes out o' that bag and you tie her to that ol' rock-grading frame against the wall." Eddie obeyed without taking his eyes off Pixie, a cute-but-cunning adversary whose wiles he knew well from previous experience.

"I know what you mean, boss," said Bronco. He pulled Pixie to her feet and escorted her forcibly across the shack's single room to the heavy wooden grader. He backed her up to it, grasped her wrists, and pulled her arms up above her head. "Tie her spread-eagled, Eddie. I'll hold her up."

"Yeah, okay." Eddie started to bind Pixie's left wrist to one of the strong slats.

"No! Not like that, you fool!" Bronco objected. "She'll squirm out of it like she did when you tied her up in town. You got to make it a lot tighter if you want it to hold her. You oughta know that."

Eddie hesitated. "Are you kiddin'?" he wondered. "Tighter than this" Pixie's expression already indicated real discomfort. "She's only human. What do ya want me to do, kill the kid?"

A trace of a smile appeared on the girl's face, unnoticed by her captors, and her eyes searched Eddie's uncertain expression for a hint of his apparently ambivalent feelings. She remembered their previous meeting.

Lasso Lass saw the matter quite differently. "No, we ain't gonna kill her. Not yet," she decreed. "Ah'll do th' tyin', Eddie." Inserting the gun under her shirt above her rope belt, she stepped forward and proceeded skillfully to tie Pixie's wrists and ankles securely in positions which would certainly make any movement, much less an actual escape, impossible.



After yanking the final knot to completion with a flourish, she stepped away and assessed her work with satisfaction. She smiled. "Yuh think yer gonna squirm out o' this, li'l filly?"

Pixie returned her sarcasm in kind. "Ask me later."

"Ah'll do that. Right now, we got some other questions."

"How'd you know where to find us?" demanded Bronco.

"I looked in the yellow pages," said Pixie dryly, "...under punks."

Bronco was incensed. He took a threatening step toward her. "I'll teach you to call us names!"

"Never mind. I already know how," Pixie demurred.

"Never mind that, Bronco," Lasso Lass said. She turned to Pixie.

"Where's Shamrock, yer pardner?"

"On vacation. Took a cruise to Alaska. We figured I could take care of rounding up your gang alone."

"Well, you figured wrong," Eddie declared. "We got you outnumbered... and if you think you can outsmart a brain like Lasso Lass..."

Pixie turned her head toward him. In truth, that's the only movement she was free to make in her spread-eagled position. "Do you think you can, Eddie?" she asked.

"What do you mean by that?" he said, puzzled. "I don't have to outsmart her. She's on my side."

This time it was the helpless girl whose eyes revealed an incongruous sympathy. Perhaps, in a way, the guileless man understood. Perhaps not. "You really believe that?" she wondered. "You believe you can trust her?"

It was Bronco who responded. "In this business, we've got to trust each other, all of us," he asserted. "Sure you can trust us, Eddie. You know that."

Pixie smiled. "Thieves' honor, eh?"

"Well, yeah," Bronco agreed. "Sure."

"I've heard of that," nodded Eddie.

"Did you teach your son all about it?...Before they sent him away to reform school?" the girl asked. Her tone was now one of irony, not contempt.

"You're a smart kid, ain't ya!" was the only reply Eddie could muster.

Bronco was more forthright. "It's us who are supposed to ask the questions here, not you!" he growled. "Where's Shamrock?"

"She couldn't make it. She has a date with a gorilla," smiled Pixie.

"Cut it out, kid!" Bronco shouted.

"Sorry. I really didn't know you'd be jealous."

"I got a little persuader here that says you're gonna talk." Bronco pulled a very lethal knife from a hidden sheath. "Where's Shamrock!" Instinctively Pixie squirmed in her bonds, but the ropes were indeed just as unyielding as she had expected. In an unnecessary demonstration of his skill, Bronco hurled his knife across the room. The point imbedded itself at least an inch in the wall. He crossed the room and removed it, glaring at their captive. She locked her jaw and looked away.

"Wait a minute, Bronco," said Lasso Lass. "I've got a better way to get her talkin'." She pulled her coiled lariat from her belt, over which it customarily hung in readiness. "But first, you go back to the cave, Eddie. Get all the boys together and stay there. Tell 'em ah want t' meet 'em all there in just a while. Don't let any of 'em leave."



"Okay, boss," he nodded. He started for the door, then just before he reached it, stopped and turned back toward her. "Are you really gonna kill the kid?"

"Don't worry about it. Whatever I do, y' know it'll turn out for the best...at least for *us*, Eddie," she assured him. He hesitated a moment, then turned and left without replying.

She returned her attention to Pixie. "Now, li'l filly, let's..."

"Why don't you give that poor guy a chance!" snapped the girl. "He doesn't need this."

"No, of course not." Her drawl was dripping with sarcasm. "With *his* brains, Eddie could be th' chairman o' th' board o' Gulf Oil Corporation."

"That's not the *point*," Pixie said. She sensed that the older girl understood her meaning much better than she would admit.

"No. The *point* is, where is *Shamrock*? Does she know you're here? Why isn't she *with* you?"

The door to the shack flew open and banged sharply against the wall.

"It looks like she *is*!" exclaimed Pixie.

Bronco spun around to face Shamrock. He moved toward her warily, his knife held at the ready. Lasso Lass needed but a second to send her lariat looping over Shamrock's shoulders with practiced accuracy.

She did not have a surprised target this time, however, and Shamrock was raising her arms to catch the encircling rope and free herself from it even as Bronco lunged forward to attack. Her booted foot drove deeply into his midriff, forcing the air from his lungs. He fell backward to the floor with an agonized gasp, the knife flying from his hand.

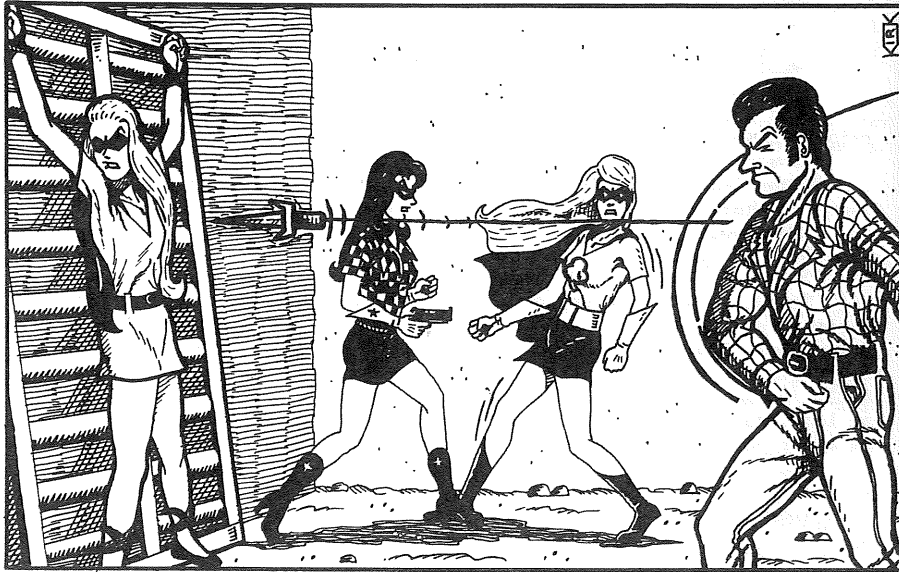
Shamrock darted toward where the knife lay on the floor.

"Look out! She has a gun!" shouted Pixie. She struggled in desperate vain to free herself and come to her sister's aid. Looking up, Shamrock saw a .45 automatic leveled at her chest.

From behind the weapon came a convincing piece of advice: "Drop it." She let the knife fall from her hand and stood up. "Come over here and get away from it," ordered Lasso Lass. She did as directed.

"Are you all right, Pixie?" she asked anxiously.

The ropes had long since cut off the circulation both in her hands and her feet. Many a spoiled twelve-year-old has complained dramatically with



far less reason. "I'm okay. They haven't hurt me," she smiled reassuringly.

"You won't be saying that for long," threatened Bronco, who had by now regained his breath and his feet.

"Oh, we ain't gonna hurt her none," Lasso Lass purred. "There's no need for that. Not now that we got the two of 'em *together*. We'll jus' take 'em into th' cave and do a li'l *sealing* job. Y' know what I mean?"

"I know one thing! We're gonna get rid of *this* little brat!" Bronco snarled. His right hand drew back, and his gleaming knife went flying through the air toward the helpless Pixie.

"What are you...!" gasped Lasso Lass in surprise. Her eyes followed the knife as it stuck with a loud "thunk" in the wooden frame, neatly cutting the rope which had bound Pixie's right wrist.

She didn't, of course, see Shamrock's foot, which simultaneously kicked the gun from her grasp. She was not prepared either for the white-gloved fist which landed with explosive anger on her jaw and sent her reeling onto the floor, dazed and shaken.

Bronco hurtled toward Shamrock with uncontrolled fury. Pixie's warning was equally sudden: "He's coming!"

Shamrock ducked out of his path and extended a leg which was in perfect position to trip him. His momentum sent him flying into the wall, and his head struck it with fully effective impact. He lay momentarily stunned.

Shamrock moved like a flash to retrieve the knife and use it to slash Pixie's bonds. Just as Lasso Lass was regaining her senses and reaching for the gun, the two sisters raced out through the door.

"What in the hell did you do you *that* for?" scowled Lasso Lass, turning the gun on her lieutenant.

Bronco shook the cobwebs from his brain. "Well, you wanted her untied didn't you? - so we could take them to the cave."

"Well, yes, but..." She knew this was no time to pursue the matter, and she jumped to her feet. "Let's get after them! If they get away, we'll lose the best chance we could ever ask for to get rid of them once and for all!"

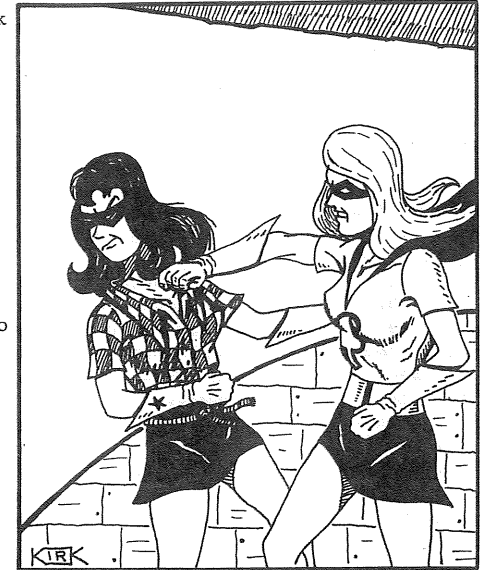
No sooner had they emerged from the shack than she spied their quarry running across the quarry floor. She raised the .45 and fired, and a bullet sent fragments flying from a rock near the feet of the sprinting Shamrock. She continued to fire at the fleeing pair, for in the direction they were heading there was no concealment or protection available to them except...

"The *cave*!" shouted Bronco exuberantly. "They're headed toward the cave! Do you think they'll go in *there*?"

"Of course. What else can they do unless they want us to trap them against the quarry wall." Almost before she had finished her prophesy it was fulfilled as her targets disappeared through the mouth of the cave. "Beautiful!" she sighed. "They've played right into our hands! Now let's go check on the boys. They'd better *be* there!"

Minutes later they entered the cave, blinking to accustom their eyes to the relative darkness inside. "Hey, you guys, c'mere!" she called.

"Hurry up!" shouted Bronco, his voice echoing strangely through the several twisting branches of the cave. Soon their curious cohorts emerged



from one of the wider passageways. "Did those two gals come back there where you could see 'em or hear 'em?" Bronco asked.

"No, we ain't seen 'em. You think they're in the cave?"

"We know they are, Eddie. We seen 'em come in. Y'all get your guns and some lights. Split up and search for 'em. And *don't* let 'em get out o' here *alive!*" ordered Lasso Lass. "Wait a minute, Smitty. You an' Fred stay here. right at the entrance. We don't want 'em sneakin' out while we're all back inside."

"Gotcha, boss. We don't need no flashlight. There's enough light here we'd see 'em all right." The rest of the gang began their search under the direction of their pretty leader and her gravel-voiced lieutenant while the two appointed guards stood watch just inside the entrance. They were not quite in a position to see the silent figures which lay in the semi-darkness on an small natural ledge above and behind them.

Pixie had been lying flat with her eyes closed. Now she opened them and sat up. She caught Shamrock's eye and nodded meaningfully.

"Are you sure?" whispered the older sister.

"As sure as I *can* be," Pixie affirmed.

"What I want to know is how did that kid get away," Smitty was saying.

"Eddie said the boss had her tied so tight she'd *never* get loose."

"Shamrock must of got her out some how I guess," offered Fred. "But don't ask Bronco how they let get away with it. Not unless you want to get punched out. He really gets *brutal* when you bring up something like that."

The two discussed a number of situations in which they had seen Bronco's violent temper flair up, to the wry amusement of the evesdroppers above them. The minutes crawled by.

Finally approaching footsteps put them on the alert. "Who's that?" Fred challenged.

Lasso Lass's voice answered. "Have y'all heard anything?"

"No, not here. You ain't found 'em in there yet, huh?"

"Hell, no!" confirmed Bronco. "There's so damn many places they could *be* in there it could take forever to spot 'em. We've got something to do outside. We'll be back soon. You two stay right here and there's no way they can sneak out, anyway."

"Don't let any o' th' boys out either. Ah want 'em to keep lookin' till they *find* 'em," added their skirted chieftain in her deceptively soft voice. She and Bronco left the cave without further explanation.

In the shadows above, two observers exchanged knowing smiles. Combing their separate knowledge, they had made a logical deduction which now seemed to be all but definitely confirmed.

"Okay, get ready," Shamrock whispered. "You take the one on your side. ...One - two - three!"

Two lithesome bodies arched through the air and landed with jarring impact upon the startled watchmen below. Shamrock's feet struck Fred's shoulders squarely, and he crumpled to the ground. He started to arise, and with her hands clinched together she clubbed him back down.

Pixie had landed in piggy-back fashion on Smitty's shoulders, and under the circumstances even her lesser weight was enough to cause him to lose his balance and topple over backward. Even before he landed on his back, she had her thighs clamped around his neck and her ankles locked securely together. She applied her favorite scissors hold with all the force she could and struggled to keep him on his back.

Fred regained his feet, and he and Shamrock engaged in a furious battle, her elusiveness and swift, well-timed jabs just about equalizing the raw power of his pile-driving punches. She hoped that he wouldn't yell for help. He didn't, perhaps because his male pride blocked that thought from his mind.

Pixie's opponent remained silent also, concentrating solely on his own effort. In fact, he seemed on the verge of escaping from her scissors. His hands gripped her slim calves, and it was all she could do to keep him from forcing her legs apart and freeing himself.

Shamrock was encountering problems of her own. One of Fred's blows landed on the side of her head with enough impact to send her almost to the ground. He caught her in a powerful bear-hug, and his arms began to force the air from her lungs. She shot a glance at Pixie.

"I'll need help here," Pixie warned. She was dodging in an effort to keep her body away from the grasping hands of Smitty and at the same time straining to keep her scissors hold on him with full pressure. He was apparently certain she couldn't hold him for long, and like his cohort, he made no effort to call the other men.

Shamrock brought the finger tips of her stiffened right hand around in an arc which ended on Fred's side just below his ribs. He winced and released his grip. She stepped back and, as he moved to attack again, caught him with a quick left jab just above the belt. Gasping, he slumped to the ground.

Seeing her sister rushing to her aid, Pixie released Smitty's head just in time for his jaw to receive the conclusive thrust of a booted heel. "Look out," she called. Shamrock spun around just too late to escape Fred's grasp. He siezed her around the waist and threw her to the ground. For a moment he stood still, poised to leap upon her, and that moment was long enough. A baseball-size rock struck him on the temple. Bonnie Donovan's schoolmates had often marvelled at the accuracy of her infield throws. He dropped to the ground semi-conscious.

"Let's go!" called Shamrock. "It's getting late." The two girls raced out through the mouth of the cave just seconds before a roaring blast sent chunks of exploded rock flying in all directions.

By the time the resulting landslide had ceased, the cave was effectively sealed. Dust still swirled in the air as the pair of escapees stood surveying the scene.

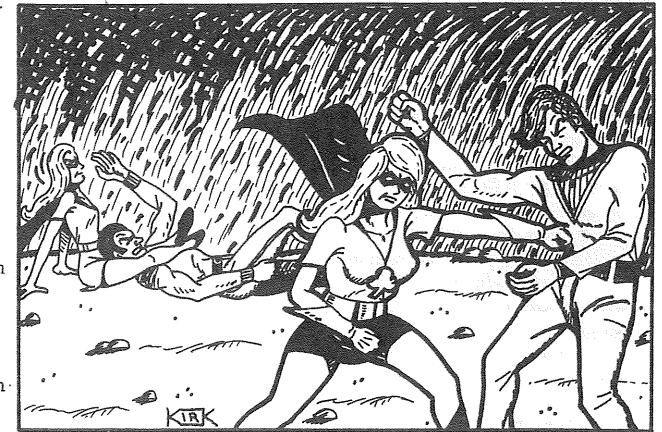
"Well!" said Shamrock finally.

"It looks like our friends won't be joining us," Pixie understated as she removed small clods of dirt from her hair.

"No, there won't be anyone leaving there; not until we get the police to *dig* them out," her sister agreed. "You know, I always *wondered* what you'd look like as a dirty blonde," she chortled.

"Oh, shut up! That black eye big Fred gave you in there doesn't do much for *your* looks either. You don't think Lasso Loss or whatever her name is will be coming back do you?"

"No, not when she finds out



that we got out of there before she exploded her little surprise on everybody. If we had been trapped inside along with the rest of them, she'd figure to come back eventually of course."

"Sure! After we'd all *starved* to death! Then she and Bronco and whatever suckers she lines up for a *new* gang could have dug their way in and recovered their stolen art. In the meantime, this would make the perfect hiding place for it."

Shamrock nodded. "Well, you interpreted her vibes right. She couldn't care *less* about those thugs. She was planning to bury them all in the cave so she wouldn't have to share the money with them when she finally sold the paintings."

"Sure. You've heard of 'thieves' honor'," defined Pixie sarcastically.

"I've heard of it, but I sure don't believe in it...Well, anyway, it's a good thing you told me about the mental impression you'd picked up from her."

"Yes, and thank goodness you knew about her setup with the explosives and were able to put the two things together. The way it all worked out, going into the cave was the best thing we could have done after we escaped from the shack."

"When she saw us run into the cave, I'll bet she was as happy as a li'l ol' boll weevil in a cotten field," smiled Shamrock.

"Ah reckon she was," Pixie mimicked. "But we sure outsmarted her!"

"Yes, by a few seconds, we *did*. We were lucky though."

"Well, they don't call you Shamrock for *nothing*!"

"You mean the little leprechauns are working for us?" Shamrock smiled.

"They sure aren't working *against* us," mused Pixie. "That little design on your shirt...I have a feeling it may be a lot more than just a green decoration."

Shamrock responded with amusement, mixed perhaps with real reflection.

"Oh, I don't know about *that*."

"Maybe not, but...you don't know *everything*."

Her sister gazed into Pixie's blue eyes, and what she saw there made her wonder whether this complex young girl might be sensing things which she did not choose to directly express. This was not the first time Heather Donovan had experienced this disquieting feeling that, despite the deeply seated love which these orphaned sisters had for one another, there were some areas in which they did not fully share their thoughts. She knew better than to pursue the matter, however, and she commented in another vein altogether.

"Well, I know one thing. I wish I'd had some of my gas pellets to use on that gang today. That would have made things a lot easier for us."

"That's for sure," Pixie agreed, rubbing a bruise on her left arm. "I'd like to know *why* Doctor Azmoff didn't send you the new supply of pellets you asked him for. It's not like him not to even answer your letters."

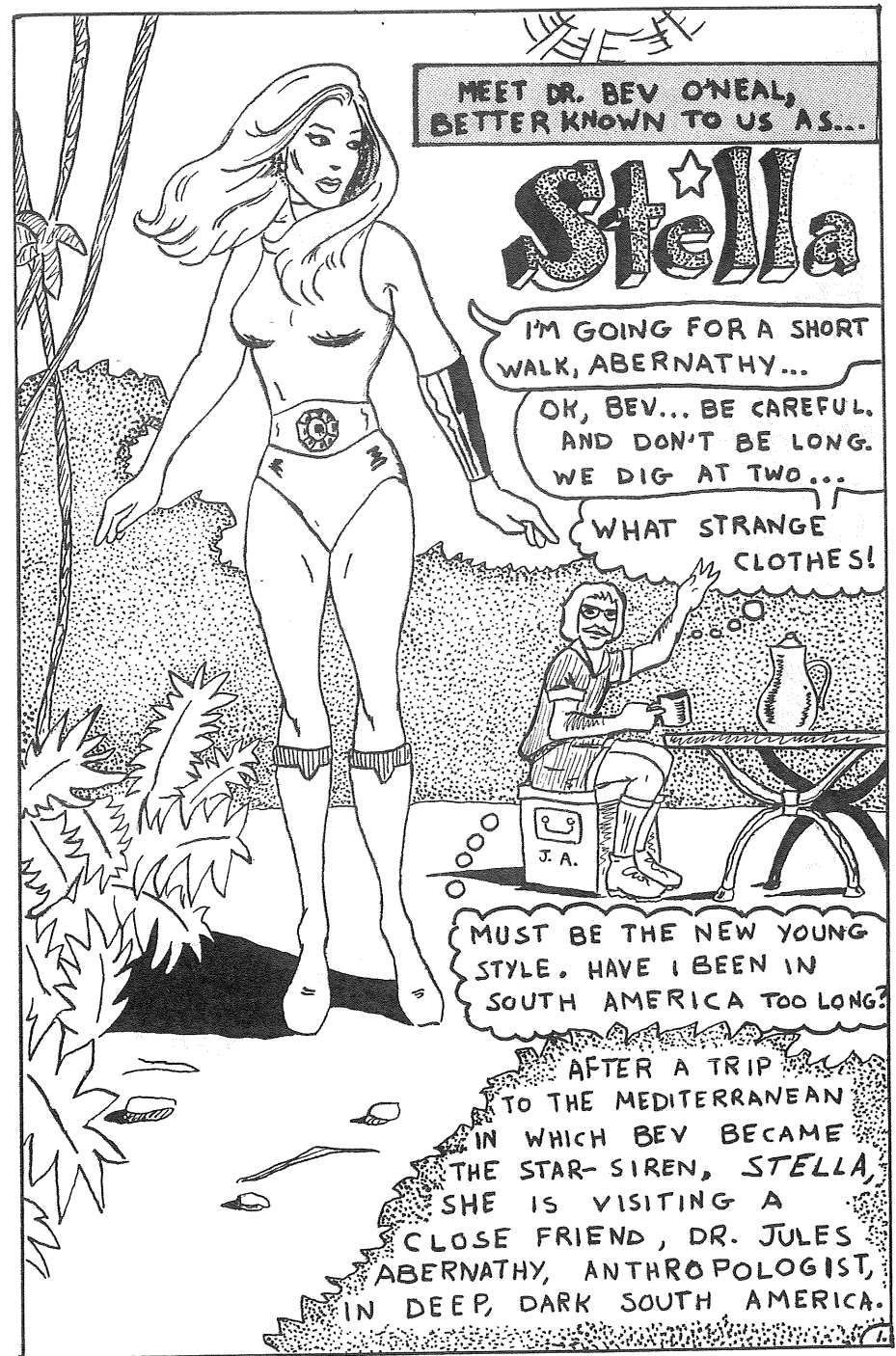
"No. Especially when I told him - in two letters in a row - that I've used all of the secret pellets he had supplied me with and I need more of them right away. I'm afraid we'd better go out to his lab in California and find out what's wrong."

Pixie tried to brush the last of the dust from white skirt. "I have a feeling you're right."

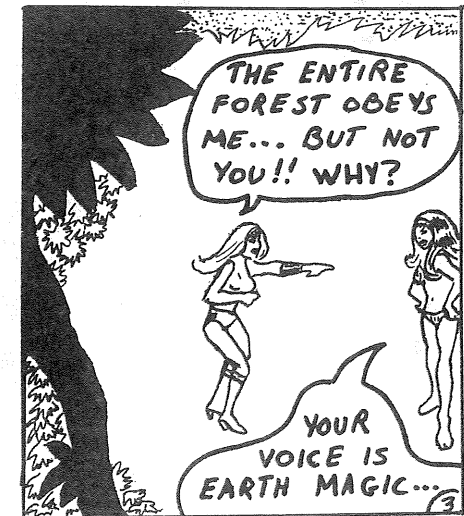
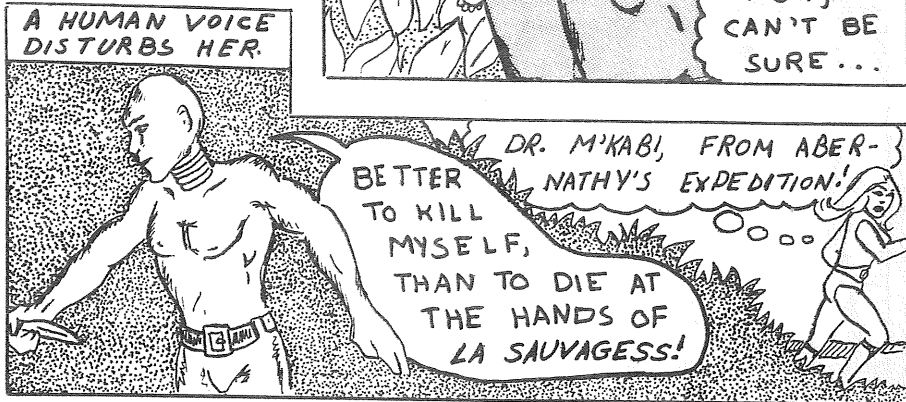
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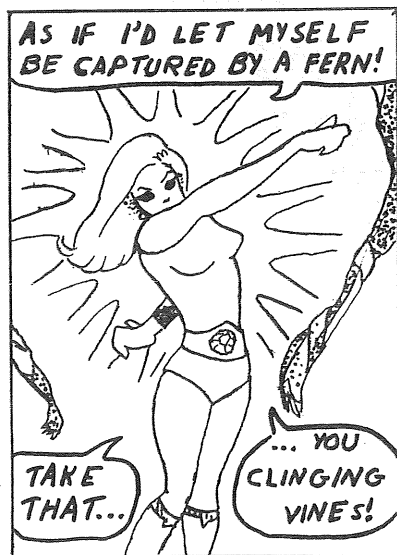
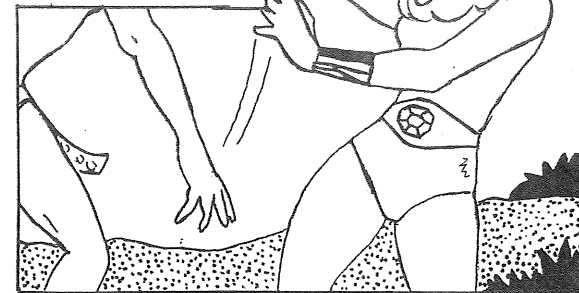
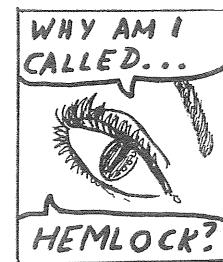
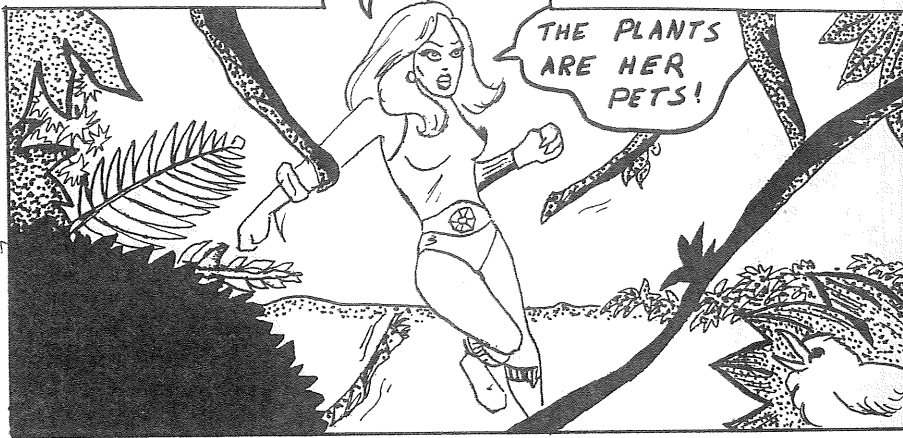
(The "origin story" of Shamrock and Pixie appeared in THE ADVENTURESS #1 and explained much of their background.)

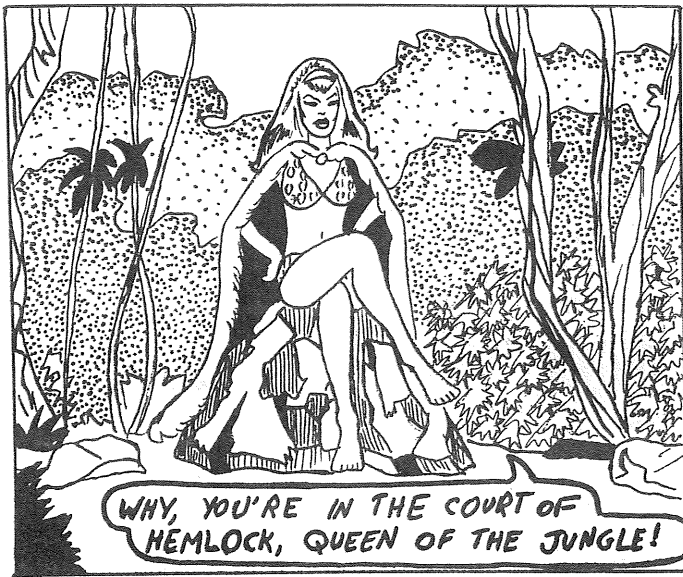
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 "The FURTHER Adventures Of Shamrock & Pixie" (parental discession is recommended where young readers are concerned) will be among the several series of special-order (non-subscription) professionally-illustrated story booklets which are now being produced by the AHPA for special-interest fans and collectors. Let us know if you'd like to receive announcements of the new booklets which become available for purchase. We anticipate that prices will range from \$3 to \$4 per booklet.







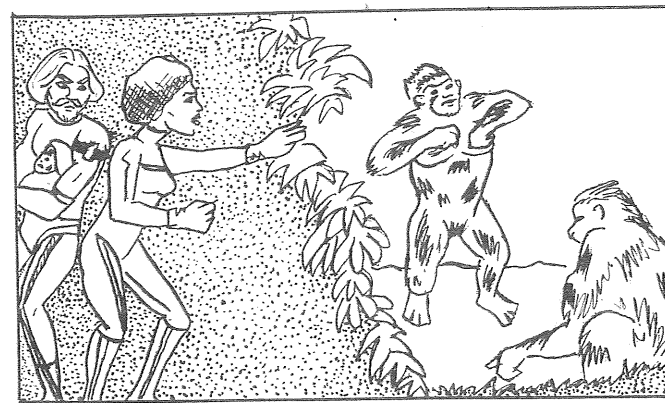




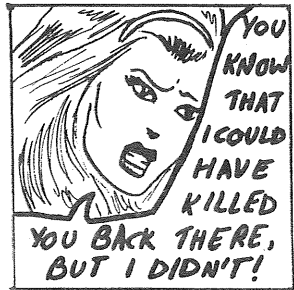
WHY, YOU'RE IN THE COURT OF HEMLOCK, QUEEN OF THE JUNGLE!



I HAD TO ASK!



I WAS ONLY AN INFANT. MY GUARDAINS LANDED IN THIS AREA, AND, THINKING EARTH A PLANET OF SAVAGE APES, LEFT ME TO BE RAISED BY THEM, SINCE I WAS A BORN KILLER.



YOU KNOW THAT I COULD HAVE KILLED YOU BACK THERE, BUT I DIDN'T!

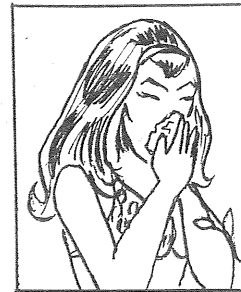


THANKS A MILLION.



SHUT UP! LET ME SPEAK!

YOU GOT IT.



HOWEVER, THE APES DIDN'T RAISE ME! PLANTS DID! I LOVED THEM, AND THEY, IN TURN, LOVED ME... THEY TOLD ME ABOUT MYSELF. I AM A BORN KILLER. THE AFRICAN, M'KABI, WAS ONE OF MY LATEST VICTIMS.

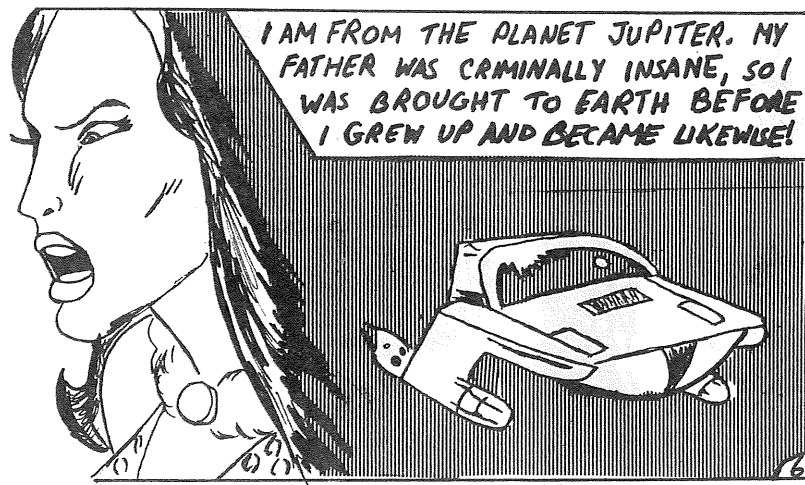


A FOE WHO HAS NO REGARD FOR HUMAN LIFE...

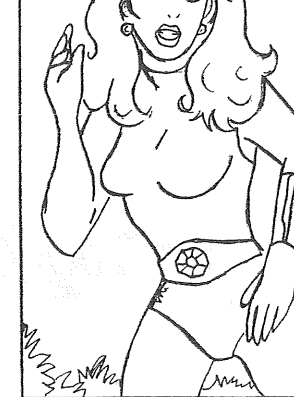


WHO KILLS BECAUSE IT'S IN HER BLOOD? HOW... HORRIBLE! I'M FACING A BONA-FIDE NUT!

AND I'M POWERLESS!



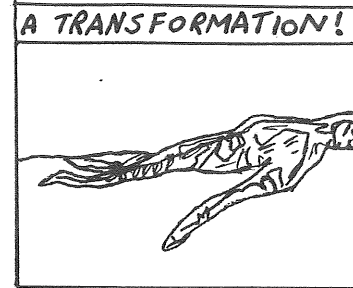
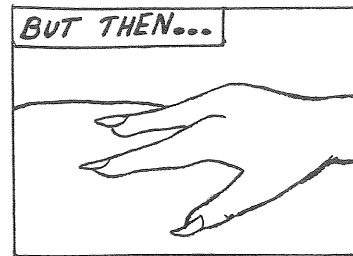
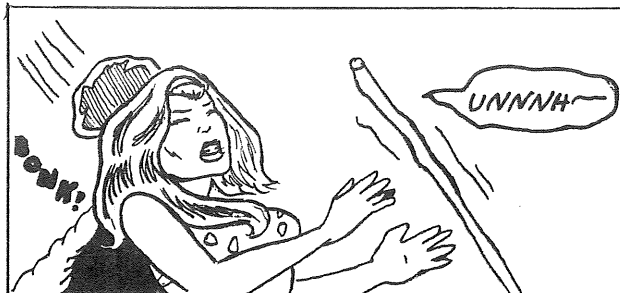
I AM FROM THE PLANET JUPITER. MY FATHER WAS CRIMINALLY INSANE, SO I WAS BROUGHT TO EARTH BEFORE I GREW UP AND BECAME LIKEWISE!



I HAVE SURVIVED BECAUSE OF THE POISON IN MY BODY! I KILLED ANIMALS BY POISONING THEM... BUT I WANT TO KNOW HOW TO CONTROL THEM! SHOW ME, HOW, AND I SWEAR YOU WILL GO FREE!











part 3

# Illesone and Alix

by Carol A. Strickland



Alix and Iba descended cold, stone stairs through a semi-lit tunnel somewhere under the Family's home.

Iba's eyes darted from side to side. For her, this was Hell itself. She jumped at each squeal or scratch that came from the smoldering darkness to either side. "What are they?" She cried out as something approached her; there was a sharp breeze at her arm, then nothing. "Oh, Alix, where are we going?"

"Those are demons, ghosts, fairies...whatever," Alix replied, matter-of-factly. "Don't be afraid. They aren't in this plane of existence. This is only a zone of communication between their world and ours."

"So Averians really are demons."

"No, Iba." Alix looked about, checked their position. "We've still a ways to go. I'll tell you about us."

"But you are immortals?"

"I'm afraid not. Just listen:

"We call ourselves Averians because we come from another world, Averia. It is a world much like this, but beyond the sky. Our sun is one of the stars you see at night."

Iba snorted her disbelief; Alix laughed. "You'll learn, you'll learn.

"Now, around three hundred years ago, my grandfather and his children had to leave Averia because they were being hunted as traitors. They had a ship that could sail the skies, and they raced off on the starwinds with their hunters pursuing them.

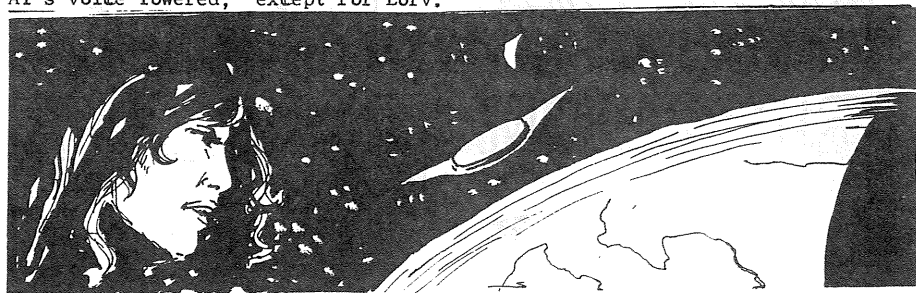
"Grandfather died, but his children kept on. They separated, going to worlds that looked as though they might have the means and wish to help grandfather's cause on Averia. Three remained three: Lorr, my father Lorr, and Lavru, who thought they detected a mighty civilization here on Talbor." Alix frowned at this, and then continued.

"They found out differently. When they tried to sail away from Talbor, they discovered that the magicks practiced here had affected their ship.

"They were shipwrecked."

"Is that so bad? I mean, being here?" Iba asked. She still did not know whether to treat the story as truth or a fairy tale.

"It was so different from Averia, Iba. But they tried to adjust and managed to retrieve a bit of their equipment from the ship. They got by," Al's voice lowered, "except for Lorr."



Iba ignored this last comment. "What about immortality? If your father was alive 300 years ago..."

"He still is. You see, Averians can heal very quickly. Would you believe that the day before yesterday, in Ji Reish, I was attacked by a roc? Gashes and cuts, though I admit they were pretty minor ones, all over," she bared her arm in front of a wall-torch for Iba to see, "not a scratch."

Iba was skeptical. "You're making it all up. Two days ago in Ji Reish? Why, that's a fortnight's sail!"

"The ship Averia is equipped with special engines from my father's star ship. So is the Midnight Star, but none of the Family's other ships. I suppose that's why so few of the Family are here. Only the Averia had the necessary speed; the others received the warning, but are still on the way. And, of course, the Star was here in port all the time."

"How do you know everyone was warned? Did you dream it?"

"Oh, no. You see, we of mixed blood, Averian and Talborian, have telepathic powers when we concentrate in a group. I don't know if it's because of our breeding, or just a family trait; some of my father's brothers and sisters had such powers, only much stronger. I'm the only true clairvoyant precognitive of the Family on Talbor, though Sony should have the same ability, since she's my identical twin."

"Yeah, about all these twins and triplets running around...how-"

"It runs in the family. Hush now; here we are."

The tunnel had opened up to a huge cavern, lit by phosphorescent rocks and lichens. A small fire glowed, smokeless, heating a steaming cauldron which was stirred by an old woman. She muttered in a sing-song fashion, occasionally stopping to peer in a ragged book.

"What-" "Shh!"

Eventually the old lady paused and happened to look up. Her pinched lips trembled into a ragged smile. "Alix! That is you, isn't it? Come here; I've finished the spell. Who is that with you?" The lady's dim eyes peered through the smoke and darkness. "Is that Crete's youngest?"

"No, Shardair. Iba, this is my father's second wife's sister; Shardair, this is Iba, who just moved in. She's an esper."

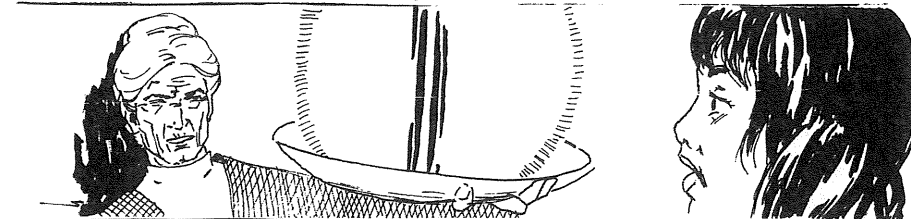
"Oh, Well, let me see here." Shardair went over to a cabinet lined with jars of powders. She moved slowly along the lines, pausing to take a pinch of powder and sniff it when she couldn't read a label. "Hmm, yes, this is it." She dumped a bit into a bowl, then returned to Iba.

"Spit," she ordered in her high, but powerful voice. Iba paused a moment, and then obeyed.

Alix reached to her boot and slid a dagger out of its sheath there.

"Hey!" Iba cried as a bit of her hair was cut and placed in the bowl.

"This is to measure your esper ability," Al explained as a sliver of Iba's thumbnail landed in the bowl.



Shardair took a clean straw, lit it in the woodfire, and placed it to the powder. A blue flame hovered over the dust a few seconds, then leapt into the air with a dazzling purple light that made Iba blink.

"It's so strange," Alix gasped. The single flame, about as wide as a straw, remained steady, climbing from the center of the bowl, while a weak blue flame formed a wide sphere around it.

"The child is not an esper," Shardair said calmly. "The blue is esper ability; she has a bit, but not much. The purple, however, that

represents psychokinetic prowess...the test for mind-over-matter. That is strong...very strong. You did right in bringing her here, Alix; she would be a valuable addition to the Family."

"The name's Iba, not 'she'!"

"Right, Iba. Let's go back upstairs. Unless you need me for anything, Aunt?"

"No, child. My magicks are ready to defend us if we need them."

"Let's hope we won't."

"I can't get over what you're telling me, Sony." Rianne and Illesone stood on the balcony under the stars. "Averians, people from another world?"

"It's true. I've seen their strange machines. They are a peaceful people, Rianne; they mean no harm to anyone."

The prince turned toward the door. "I shall have to think on this, Lady, before I bring the matter before my father. Until tomorrow." He bowed and left.

There was a sharp clump! on the balcony behind Sony; she didn't flinch a muscle.

"It's about time you showed yourself, sister. I've felt your beady eyes on me for the last hour."

Alix was crestfallen. "There was no way you could have seen me on the roof!"

"I always know when you're around, Al. How are things at home?"

"Bad. Some townspeople started shouting and throwing things at the house this afternoon. No one was hurt."

"The children were all put on the Midnight Star and Averia, along with all the new parents. Oh, and Lavru, too. She's expecting any day now."

"That leaves the adults at home, and Iba, who insisted on staying - I'll tell you about her later. We're still moving out equipment and the animals. Dad says we'll be finished day after tomorrow."

"And you?"

Alix paused, recalling her visions. "Tomorrow. I see...fighting, ships sailing without us...a storm..."

"But you've always told me that's just the possible future, Al. Now, I've told Rianne the truth about us - he's too smart for me to trick."

"I noticed you didn't tell him you were Averian."

"Yes, well... He'll tell the king what I've said, and whatever you think, the king's no fool, either. Eventually Keswirl'll be on our side; it's in the bag." She frowned.

"Except for Sanfid. He's some power-hungry duke who's been beating the 'Averians are demons' bit into the king's head. Wants to kill us all, I guess."

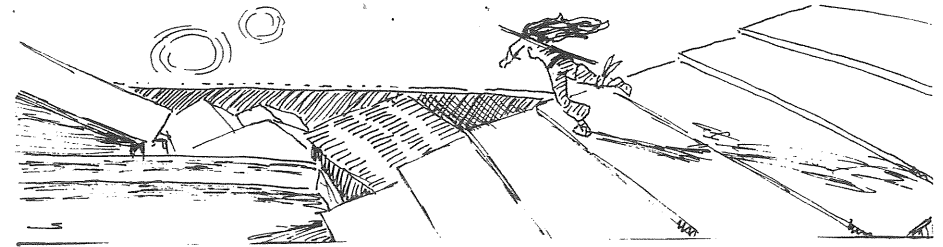
"What's he want? Our business holdings?"

"Probably. And the crown to boot. I'll try to keep an eye on him. Say -" Sony had an idea, "there's a banquet tomorrow night. By then, I hope, the king will be warmed up to the idea of Averians. Why not have the Family send an emissary there, to speak on behalf of us? Nedif - yeah, Nedif, he has an honest face. It'll force the king to re-issue a statement of his policy - and by that time, it'll be favorable to us."

"Are you sure?"

"Have I ever lied to you? Let me rephrase that..."

Alix was still wondering as she worked her way home, via rooftop, from the palace. Suddenly came the distant sound of fighting; she quickened her pace.



In minutes she arrived above the trouble. Twenty townspeople were attacking a lone rider - Nedif! Whipping her staff out of its lashings on her back, Alix noted that Nedif had been forced to rely on his sword, the ultimate weapon for a pacific Averian. He had been stabbed several times, and his weak thrusts showed the wounds' severity.

With a shout, Al leapt to the ground. She butted one per in the back of the neck; he fell unconscious. Her staff swung and struck again; another one down.

Her sudden appearance had caught the crowd by surprise. She took advantage of the situation and swung up behind Nedif on his horse. Parrying attacks, she dug her heels into the horse's ribs and galloped off.

"Alix..." Nedif wearily began. His sword fell from his hand and clattered on the pavement behind them as he collapsed.

"Thea!" Al's low curse was more of a plea for help as she tried to steady and comfort her unconscious cousin.



With matter of such importance on her mind, is it any wonder that she did not see the cloaked servant who, seeing the female Averian's face, silently scurried away to his master's house?

"He'll be all right," Beniri announced to the small crowd around Nedif's bed.

"Good," The light-skinned man put his hand on the captain's shoulder. "Tomorrow you will go to the king," he said.

"What do you mean?" Alix cried in astonishment. "He's hurt!"

"He'll be able to get around tomorrow, daughter. Your sister was quite correct in her choice. Captain Nedif has an outstanding reputation among his peers and merchants. His blondeness makes him a visual repre-



representative of our people, as well as a vocal one. His wounds may win him sympathy - and shed doubt on the legends of our 'immortality'. And, as Illesone said," Lorn smiled slightly, "he does have an honest face."

"Thanks," Nedif murmured weakly.

Beniri quickly ejected everyone from the room. Alix was the last to go. She started to say something, but stopped.

"Are you sure you'll be all right?" she finally asked.

"I'll be all right, Al."

She shut the door behind her.

"Your highness, I must protest!" Duke Sanfid's voice rang above the shouting tumult of the banquet hall.

Before the king's elevated table stood Nedif, a calm, commanding figure amid the uproar his appearance had caused. His bandaged and be-slung arm caused wonder and confusion to some; to others it was a demon's trick to catch them off guard.

Slowly King Keswirl stood up, stopping all dissent by his royal dignity. "It has come to my attention," he slowly said, "that there might be another version of the Averians' story. Let this spokesman tell his people's side." He glared at any would-be objectors and sat down, nodding to Nedif.

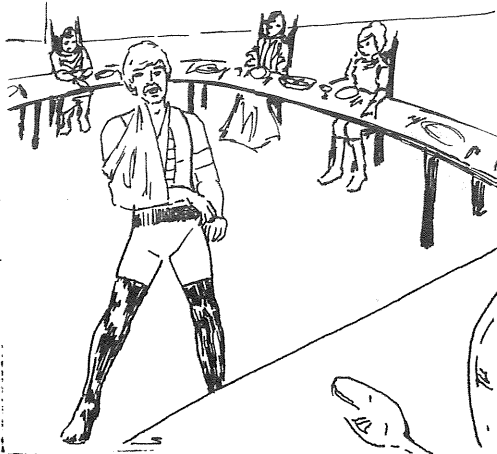
The captain told his story of the nature of Averians and their wish to remain in their adopted city in peace.

"Three centuries ago," he concluded, "Mor Grodan was a poor, dirty city full of hunger and disease. My family has worked to make it what it is today: a prosperous capital, with food for everyone and control of plagues. We ask that you consider that in making your final decision on us." He bowed gravely and waited.

"Well spoken, Averian." Keswirl pondered for a space, then looked about. "Are there any who would discuss the matter?"

Duke Sanfid stood up. "Your highness, surely you see beyond this farce! Captain Nedif faces us here, swathed in bandages to show his... mortality." The duke fairly spat out the word. "I say, let him show his wounds!"

He walked around the tables, to the one where Illesone sat, apprehensive. "Not demons, he says. Oh what angels we are, he claims. What would you say, Highness, if these 'angels' had secreted a spy in your palace?"



Sony paled.

Sanfid pulled her up out of her chair. "Here is their spy!"

"Prove it!" someone yelled.

Ordering a servant to hold her so she couldn't move, Sanfid seized a knife from the table. Grasping Sony's hand and pulling it up so that all could see, he carefully slit the palm until it barely started to bleed; but to all around him, it looked like a bloody gash. Sony's alien body chemistry closed the small wound quickly.

"See!" Sanfid pointed to the apparently-healed wound. "Here is your spy - and an immortal one at that. Does anyone doubt that these Averians are demons?"

The king stood and raised his hand for silence. Suddenly, an arrow sliced through the air, piercing his chest. He looked puzzled for an instant, then fell over the table, dead.

"Kill the Talborians!" A crowd of armed pers stormed the room, dressed as Averians.

Nedif jumped over tables to Sony's side. "Owtch! You okay?"

"Only a scratch, but if we stay in here, we won't have a chance. There must be a hundred of those fake Averians in here!"

"Come on - the window!" Throwing the table on its side, he and Sony carried it shield-like, between them and the massacre. They reached the window; Sony swung herself up on the roof and then reached down to hoist Nedif. She noted his wince as he scrambled up; his wounds had opened again and were bleeding.

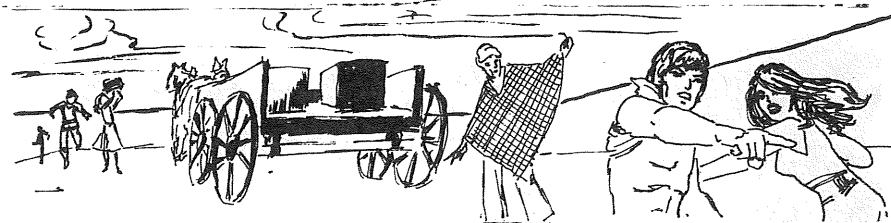
"We stay here until dark," she ordered him. "We can get away then. Besides, you need the rest. Let's see that bandage now."

"Yes, Mother. But look yonder."

From their high vantage point, they could see across the entire city. A huge army was galloping toward the Averian stronghold. "Do you think they got out?"

"They'd better have." Nedif nodded to the harbor. The last Averian ship anchored there, the newly-arrived Moonshadow, was pulling speedily away from a soldier-laden dock.

But many were still in the city. The remaining Averians, save Iba, who was strangely missing, were busy loading Shardair's magic supplies onto a wagon, to be taken to the docks. Suddenly, the rumble of shouting split the air.



No words were spoken as they quickened their loading. Alix and Shardair took a few bottles from the wagon. Alix started to open a few.

"No, child," Shardair snapped. "You'll be needed at the gates!"

Alix nodded, and ran to a street entry. Starting to reach for her staff, she instead unsheathed her sword, her eyes cold with grim resolve. Ordinarily, such a small group as the Averians would stand no chance against the horde, but the Averians were defending their property, and the army had to come to them through narrow archways, in double-file.

Her skin prickled as she half-sensed Shardair's spell beginning, but she thrust the thought out of her mind; the army was upon them - her first enemy stood before her. She met his thrusts and struck, sickened by her actions. But they kept coming and coming - the guilt of murder quickly passed.

Dimly sensing the wind rising, she fought on, then noticed that even the dim light of dusk was suddenly blotted out.

Crack! and another crash! Lightning darted from the sky again and again, encircling the building. Alix had to brace herself on the wall against the thunderous, exploding roar from all around the outside of the compound.

Through a glaze of searing light, she saw a movement, and struck out blindly. Then there was no more attack, only the repeated assault from the sky-sparks.

Someone touched her shoulder, and led her away from the entry.

"Quickly, Alix! To the wagon!" he shouted above the din.

"Lorn?" Alix's clearing eyes searched through the whiteness for her father. Gropingly, she ran to where she thought the wagon was.

Everyone was there...save one. "Iba!" Alix shouted hoarsely.

"Where's Iba?"

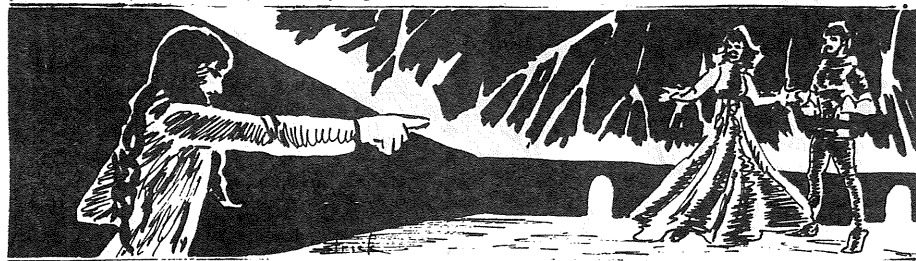
"Who? Iba?" Next to Whathari, Batipe paled and swayed.

Whathari caught her, and anxiously cried, "Are you hurt?"

"No, she is not." Iba appeared suddenly out of the black gale and pointed toward Arl's fiance. "Let you all know, Averians, that this is the one who betrayed you. There - my sister Batipe, fiance not to Whathari, but to the Duke Sanfid of Mor Grodan."

Alix suddenly realized that she had never seen the two together. But Iba continued:

"She threw me out of her home. My sister, my only living relative! She wanted to be powerful, the duke's wife, so when he told her to find out the secrets of the mysterious Averians, she obeyed by becoming accepted into their family... and by betraying them."



"Why didn't you tell us before?" Alix cried helplessly.

The child's eyes were raging with frigid hatred for her sister. "I did not put the pieces together - til now, when I saw her."

"Ba - Batipe..." Whathari reached for her, confused.

But she had edged away from the crowd, and now stood on the arch to the outside, silhouetted against the lightning.

"You will never catch me, filthy demons!" she shouted. "I am the duke's woman, not one of you!" She turned to the street, and was shocked: the bar-

rage of lightning in the street was erupting to ring the building in a sheet of blue-white flame. Beyond that, she could see the mass of soldiers screaming in terror and rage.

"I will go back to Sanfid, while you are destroyed by your own magicks!" She turned to the army. "Come!" she screamed through the storm. "They are at their weak-"

Alix covered her eyes as a white-hot bolt shrieked down from the heavens. Through the roar of thunder, she dimly heard the woman's matching death screech.



"Quickly - all of you!" A whip cracked, silent in the storm's thunder, and the wagon approached the wall of flame. It opened to form a protected corridor out of the city.

"Come on!" Guiding the dazed Whathari, Iba shouted back to Alix.

But the young woman paused a moment to look at Batipe's charred husk, an arrow lodged in the corpse's heart, before she ran after her family.



# DEATHLOOKS

THE BLONDE BOMBSHELL!

HEY, 'PUTER.

present.

WE'VE GOT PROBLEMS.

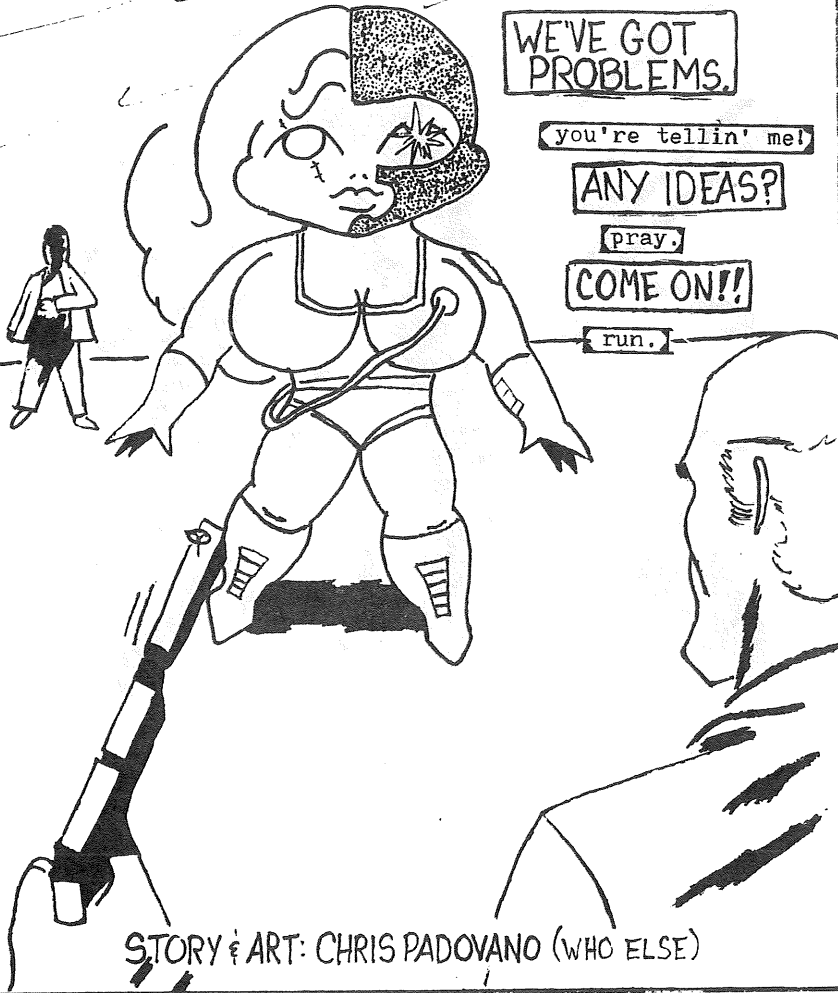
you're tellin' me!

ANY IDEAS?

pray.

COME ON!!

run.



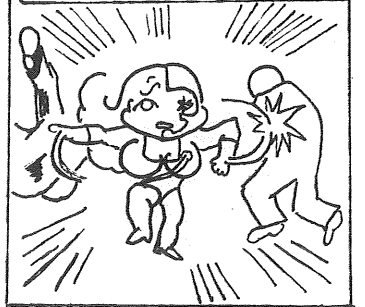
STORY & ART: CHRIS PADOVANO (WHO ELSE)

RUN?

they'll never suspect.....

so run already!

I'M RUNNIN', I'M RUNNIN'!



keep running.

TO WHERE?

well, first we have to save our good friend, raker...

THEN?

then we have to get a tune up...

ABOUT TIME!

then we have to save the world..

WHY?

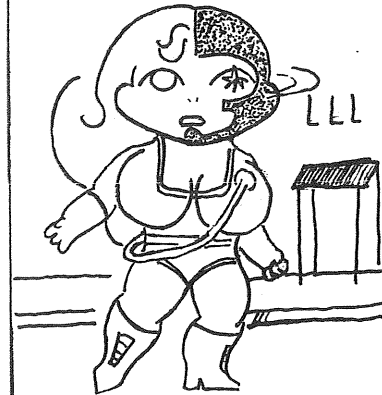
if you're marvel, you save the world.

oh!



you will listen to me

'PUTER! WHAT'S THAT?



i give up.

I am your master

MY WHAT?!  
'PUTER!

don't look now, sweetheart, but i think we are in big trouble.

WHO ARE YOU?!



