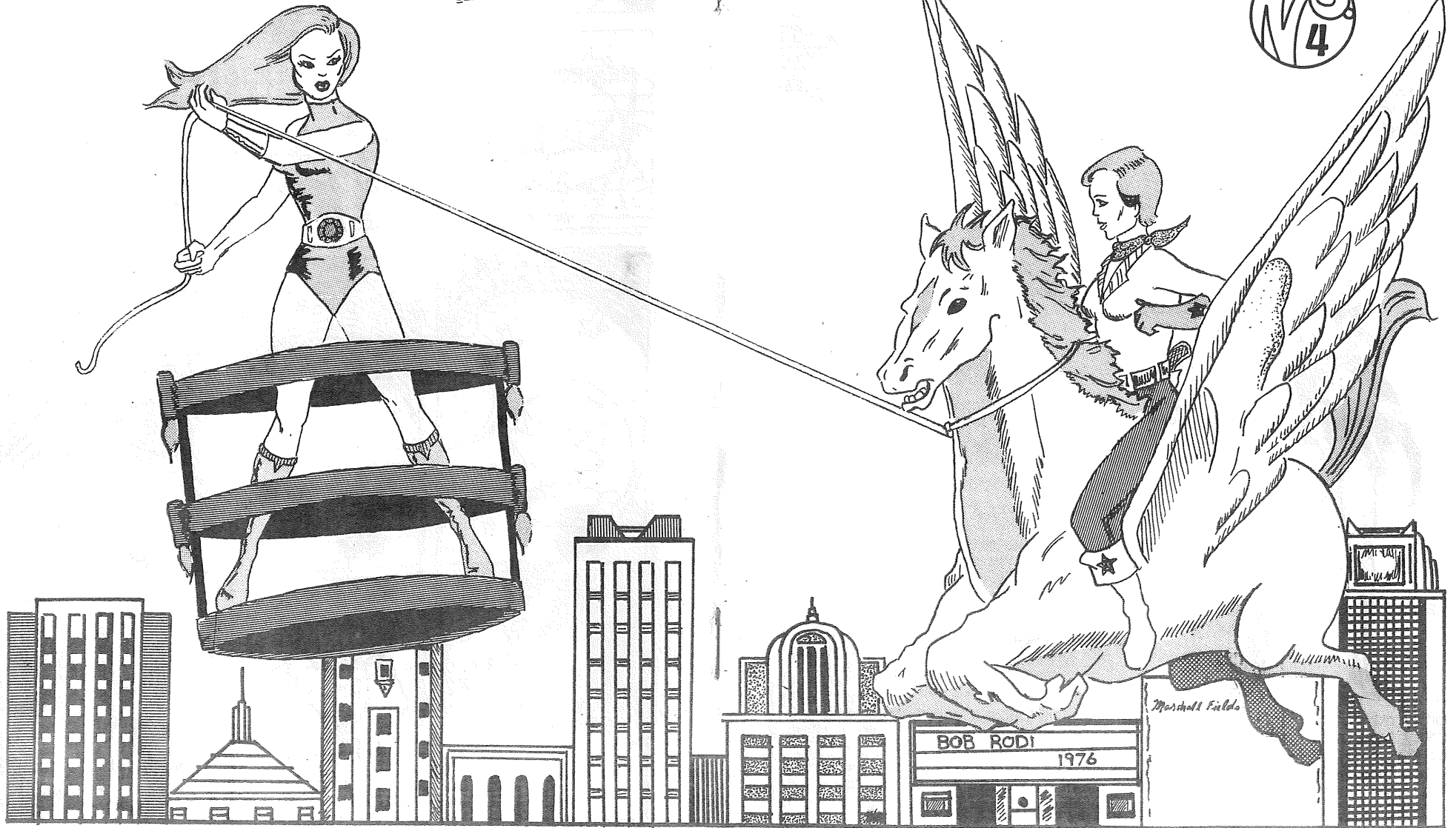
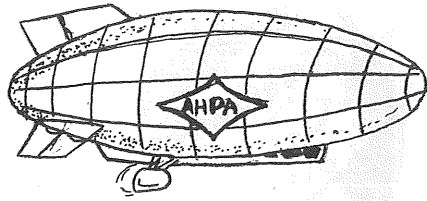


# the adventuress



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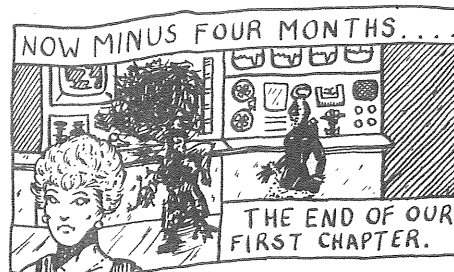
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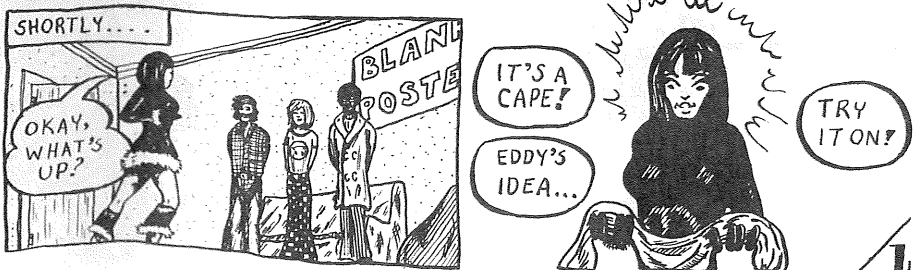
# RAVEN

"CHILD'S PLAY"



STORY + ART:

JEFF THOMPSON  
WITH A MUCH APPRECIATED SCRIPTING ASSIST FROM  
JOHN BIEBEAU



BUT AS SOON AS SHE HAS THE CAPE ON, IT SEEMS TO DISAPPEAR...



ALONG WITH PARTS OF HER!

HOW...?



WELL, USING THE VAN VLACK THEOREMS OF LIGHT REPRAC-TION/REFLECTION, THE TWO LAYERS OF TRANSPARENT



PLASTIC CONTAIN A LIQUID WITH SOME CRYSTALLINE PROPERTIES, AND AN ABILITY TO CREATE INVISIBILITY...



I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT!



ME NEITHER...

...AND THE HISSING OF SUMMER LA-AWNS... WE HAVE JUST RECIEVED A REPORT OF A ROBBERY AT THE RODI RD. BRANCH OF FAIRBANKS SAVINGS AND LOAN. MOTORISTS ARE...



HEY, BRENDA, YOU HEAR THAT...?



...BRENDA...?

ESCAPISM. SOME PEOPLE READ COMICS. BRENDA BYRDE FLIES.

ESCAPISM. BRENDA BYRDE SEEMS TO DIS-APPEAR, REPLACED BY A DARK BIRD, AN AVENGING FORCE FOR GOOD.



ESCAPISM. SOME PEOPLE CAN STILL TELL WHEN THE PRETENDING STARTS AND THE REALITY ENDS....

SOME PEOPLE.

MEANWHILE, AT THE SCENE OF THE CRIME...

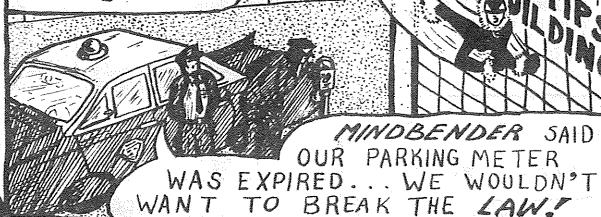
ARE YOU SURE YOU HAVE EVERYTHING YOU NEED, MINDBENDER? HERE, TAKE MY WATCH.



I DON'T HAVE ANY CASH. DO YOU TAKE CREDIT CARDS?

MINDBENDER, YOU'RE ABSOLUTELY INCREDIBLE!

HEY! WHY AREN'T YOU INSIDE?



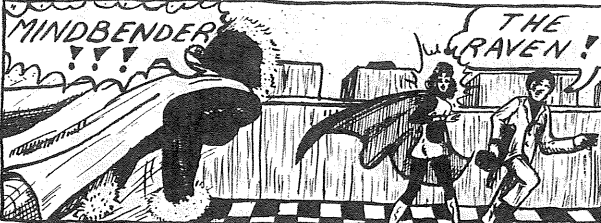
MINDBENDER SAID OUR PARKING METER WAS EXPIRED... WE WOULDN'T WANT TO BREAK THE LAW!



OF COURSE! THIS MAKES ME THE GREATEST CRIMINAL OF ALL TIME!

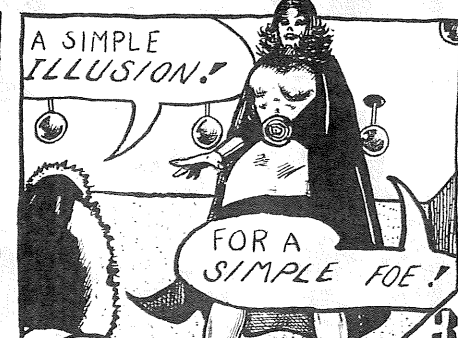


MINDBENDER! JUST WHAT I NEED! ... YEAH, MAYBE A GOOD FIGHT IS JUST WHAT I NEED RIGHT NOW! I ONLY HOPE SHE'S READY!



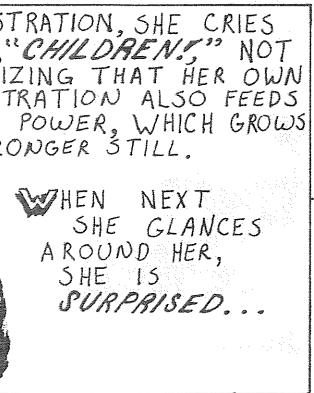
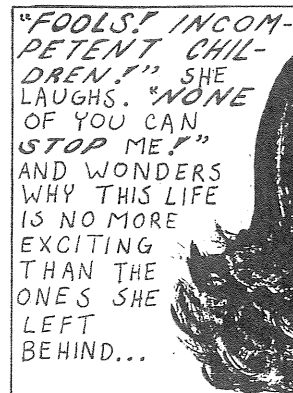
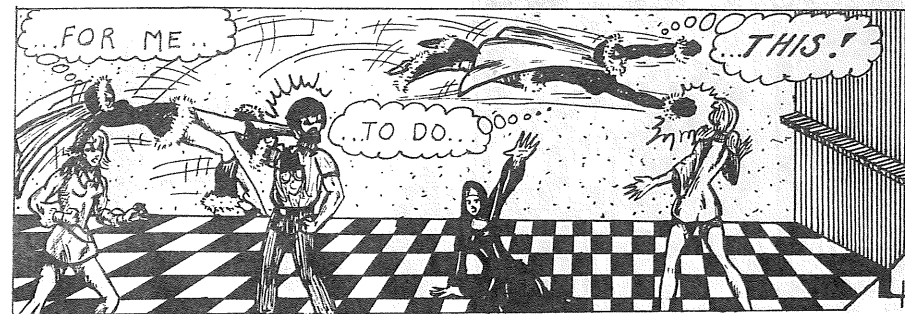
MINDBENDER!

THE RAVEN!



A SIMPLE ILLUSION!

FOR A SIMPLE FOE!

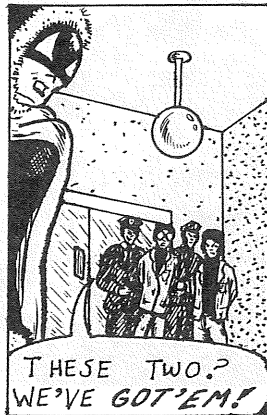


# BRADAM!

WITH MINDBENDER UNCONSCIOUS, THE POWER DISSIPATES...



SHE'S OKAY... I THINK.... BUT...



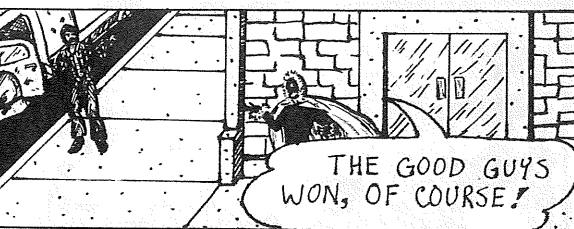
THESE TWO? WE'VE GOT 'EM!



WELL, THEN I GUESS IT'S BACK TO THE BATCAVE!

OUTSIDE....

HEY, BIRD-LADY! WE GOT HERE AS FAST AS WE COULD. WHAT HAPPENED?



THE GOOD GUYS WON, OF COURSE!

BRAVO! ANOTHER BLOW FOR TRUTH, JUSTICE, AND THE AMERICAN WAY! MOM AND APPLE PIE! FREEDOM AND DEMOCRACY!



ABBOTT AND COSTELLO.

ABBOTT AND...

THE END

NEXT: THE ORIGIN OF RAVEN! NEW MEXICO'S LARGEST ROCK FESTIVAL! AND JUST WAIT TILL YOU MEET: "THE DEVIL IN BRIGHT ANGEL!" THE ULTIMATE IN FEAR!

TOM BIERBAUM WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR MUCH OF THE LAYOUTS AND PACING. THIS IS DEDICATED TO HIM. 6

# STELLA

by RODI



RING!



YES?

I CAME TO SEE A LADY ABOUT A HORSE.



OH, THAT'S RIGHT. YOU MUST BE STELLA... I'M TELLE STARR...

THE EX-RHINE-STONE COWGIRL!



YOU?! YOU'RE THE COWGIRL?



I WAS... AND WHY NOT? EXCUSE ME WHILE I FINISH IN THE KITCHEN.

I THOUGHT YOU'D BE... OLDER.

HOW OLD DO YOU THINK I AM?

OH, GEE...  
40, MAYBE?  
UH... 45?  
55 IF SHE'S A DAY!



I'M 103 YEARS OLD AND FEELING LIKE 16!

OH, DEAR ME... 103?  
THAT WAS MY NEXT GUESS... HEY, ISN'T THAT ELLA FITZGERALD ON THE STEREO?

YES... DESPITE THE NAME, I HATE COUNTRY MUSIC!  
Sooo... YOU'RE A NEW LADY HEROINE, eh?  
AND YOU'D LIKE MY OLD HORSE, BYRON THE BOLD? OK. WANT TO HEAR HIS LIST OF CREDENTIALS?

TO TELL THE TRUTH, MS. STARR... uh... TELLE... I AM A BIT CURIOUS ABOUT YOUR CAREER!  
HOW NICE OF YOU! I ONLY QUIT HEROINING 10 YEARS AGO TO GET MARRIED, YOU KNOW. BUT I STARTED IN 1904...

...1904...not a banner year in the grand scheme of things, but for me, well, a milestone, to say the least. Born a proper New England lady, I had already taken shocking strides by entering a man's profession, journalism. But I was to learn that strides tend to get larger as one progresses.

I had been sent by my paper, Boston's Weekly Observer, to a ghost town in the old west. Back then, ghost towns were still something of a recent development, and still a bit of a phenomenon. I was to give our readers a first-hand description of one.

The town I was sent to was called Rhinestone Alley. Like rhinestones, the town's remains reeked of the imitation wealth and glamor...perhaps there was poetic irony in the town's name. No gold or other wealth was ever found there.

While strolling through Rhinestone Alley (no tour guide was available to me), taking copious notes, I spied a large, saucer-like object sitting in the sky about a block away. UFO's were unheard of then, so I approached, curious. On my way to the saucer's area, I came upon a man in the street, though he was unlike other men I had known. He had antennae on his head, and a large, dull white gem on his forehead. I assumed he had something to do with the saucer.

"Excuse me, sir," I asked, "Are you, by any chance, alive?"

His antennae quivered, then he answered, "Yes I am, Earth-girl. Perhaps you could help me improve my odds of staying that way."

"My name, sir, is Telle Starr, of the Weekly Observer. What do you want me to do?"

"My name, Telle Starr, is Harras, and if you could manage to find water within fifty miles, I'd appreciate a drink."

I had a canteen with me, so I gave it to him. He weakly took it, drank, and then, the jewel on the man's forehead throbbed a bright red, and he left up. "Thank you, Telle Star," he said, "people of my planet dehydrate so very quickly...I lost my strength before reaching my ship."

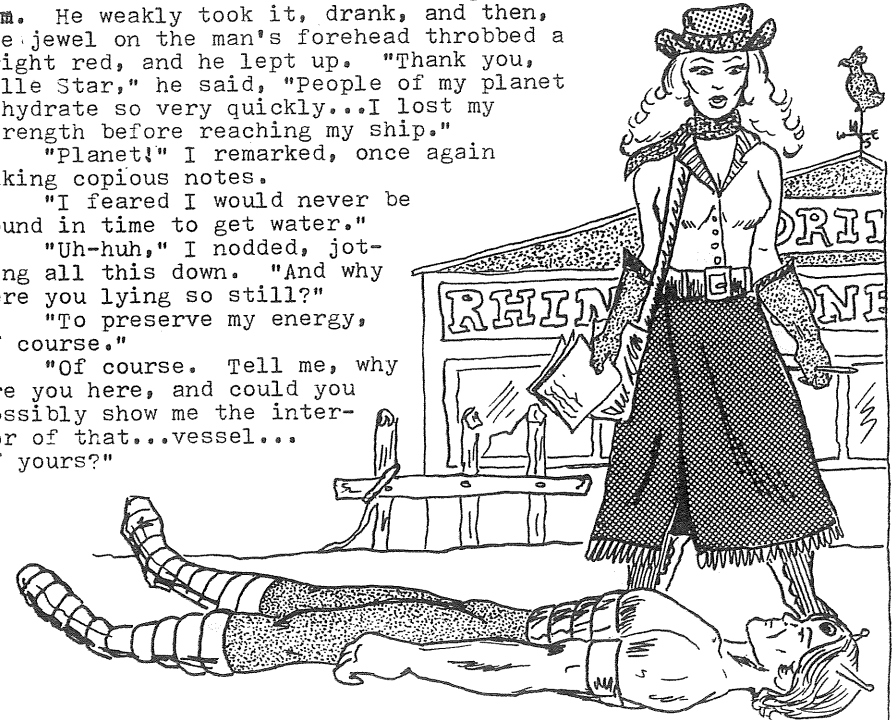
"Planet!" I remarked, once again taking copious notes.

"I feared I would never be found in time to get water."

"Uh-huh," I nodded, jotting all this down. "And why were you lying so still?"

"To preserve my energy, of course."

"Of course. Tell me, why are you here, and could you possibly show me the interior of that...vessel... of yours?"



"Why not?" he replied, and the gem on his forehead glowed eerily. When it stopped, we had been transported aboard the massive piece of machinery. "Oh, my," I said, in reference to the jewel. "Do you know where I could get one of those?"

"I'm afraid you have to be born with one. In answer to your first question, I'm here on an expedition looking for a new world for my people. We've overpopulated our own world, and need a new place to send a colony."

"Look at all the room we've got around here," I offered.

"Not so," he said, antennae quivering. "By my calculations, this planet is populating itself at such a rate that the intervention of my people would cause disaster in...say...fifty years."

"Too bad," I said, writing hastily. Then, my pencil broke, and, angrily, I shouted, "Oh...poison ivy! Oh, excuse me for using a rash word."

Harras looked at me strangely. "I like you. And I owe you a favor. It is customary, on my planet, to grant three wishes to benefactors."

"Oh," I quipped delighted, as I prepared my allotted three.

But, he went on..."After an extensive study of your people, I've discovered the three most common human desires, and it is these three I will grant you."

Sullen, I disagreed, but this time kept a civil tongue in my head.

"First, the desire to live forever."

The gem glowed at me, after which he said, "Now, though you will eventually die, your aging process has been slowed to a crawl. You'll live hundreds of years."

"But what if I don't want..."

"Second, the desire to possess great strength." Again, the gem glowed, and my body tingled. "Now," he said, "I'm sure you'll find yourself the healthiest of your companions, to say the least."

"But I don't care about tha..."

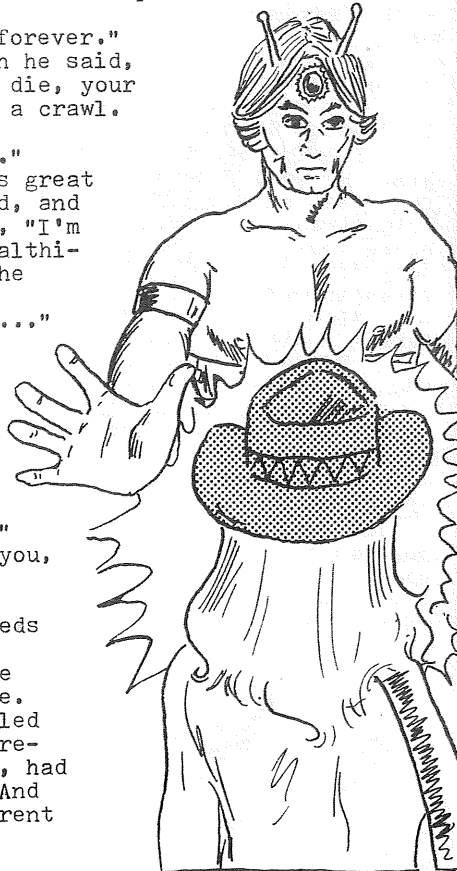
"Third, and lastly, the desire to fly." He thought for a bit. "This isn't so easy," he said. He turned away, the gem glowed, and when the glow faded, a magnificent horse had appeared in the ship. "Sorry, this is the best I can do."

"But I've never ridden a..."

"Well, once again, I thank you, and I hope you will use your new attributes to aid humanity. One thing is certain, if any race needs aiding, it is this one."

"Can't I have something else instead?" I pouted, one last time.

Just then, another glow filled the ship, and a woman appeared, resembling Harras in that she, too, had antennae and a jewel forehead. And her jewel was red hot with apparent anger.



"Who's that?" I whispered to Harras.

Grimly, he answered, "One of my former co-workers, Hernia."

"She doesn't seem very pleasant."

"It's not her fault...she's insane, that's all."

"Oh," I said, unbelieving. "Is THAT all?"

"So, Harras," Hernia said mockingly, "Associating with human races now, eh? It only proves that I deserve the scouting post you stole from me!"

"I didn't steal this post from you," Harras shouted back, angrily, "It was given to me by Overlord Hestra."

"It was stolen!" screeched Hernia, "And I'm here to take it back!" Her gem burst forth with a flood of light, and Harras collapsed. "Now," Hernia said, angrily glaring at me, "Get out of this ship, and take this animal with you."

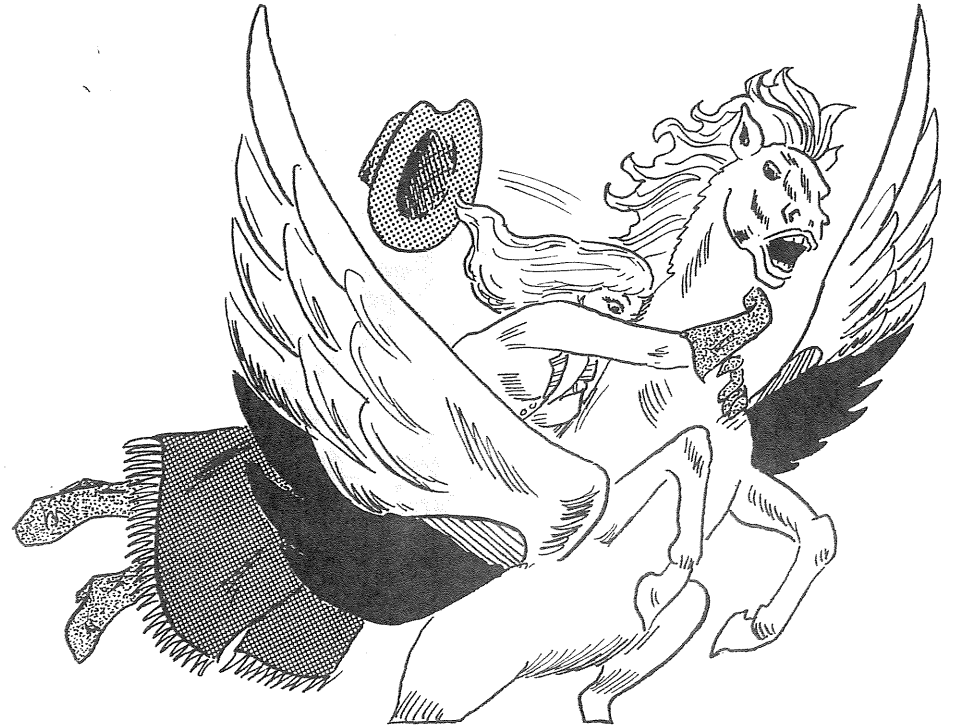
"I'd like to," I stuttered, "But we haven't even met yet." I looked at the horse. "Here horsey, c'mon! Let's go outside, c'mon..." No reaction.

Hernia, impatient, used her gem, and we found ourselves transported to the dusty street of Rhinestone Alley again, watching the saucer fly away. Harras lifted his head of the ground, saw the ship escaping, and shouted, "After her."

I looked around, wondering who he was talking to. "You mean, me?"

"You see anybody else around here?" Harras snapped.

The horse came up to me, and I gingerly mounted him, only to have him bolt away with me half-on and half-off. "Hold on!" I shouted, but no such luck. I gradually pulled myself to an upright position, which was really not much more comfortable. Nobody who has never ridden should be forced to start bareback.



As we flew along, at speeds entirely too great for one whose experience at this sort of thing had been limited to merry-go-rounds, a thought occurred to me, what was I to do when we overtook the ship? I hadn't the slightest idea.

The horse had. As soon as the ship was running neck-and-neck with us, he reared in mid-air, sending me sailing toward the craft. Trying to think calmly (a difficult feat when you're screaming at the top of your lungs) I extended my fists, and, due to my tremendous strength, I battered a hold in the spaceship, leading right to the cabin.

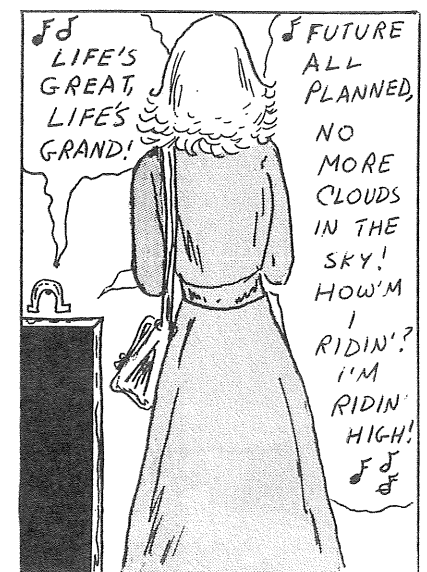
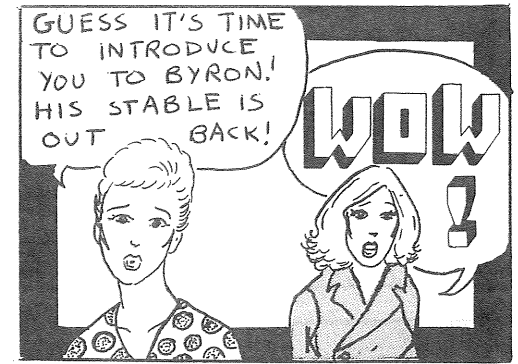
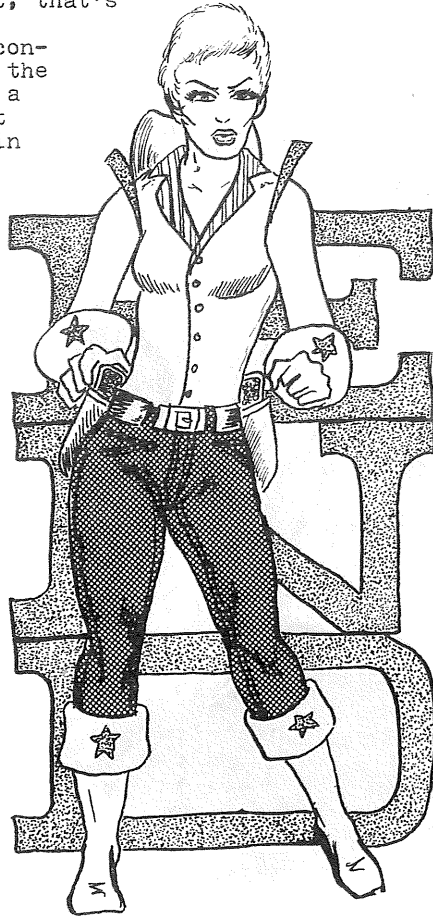
"Meddlesome Earth-worm!" cried Hernia, and a blast from her gem knocked me out the hole, but the horse caught me. Then, mounted in mid-air, we watched as the ship, losing its pressure balance, flailed about wildly, eventually crashing in a small explosion about a mile from us, in the desert.

From then on, the horse, which I named Byron the Bold, and I were a team. We returned to the East Coast where our adventures were relatively few (once in awhile there was a brawl at a ladies' tea, but nothing big). It wasn't until World War II that super-people became popular, so I designed a costume, and Byron and I entered the War Effort. But, that's another story.

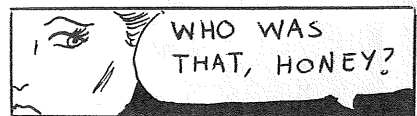
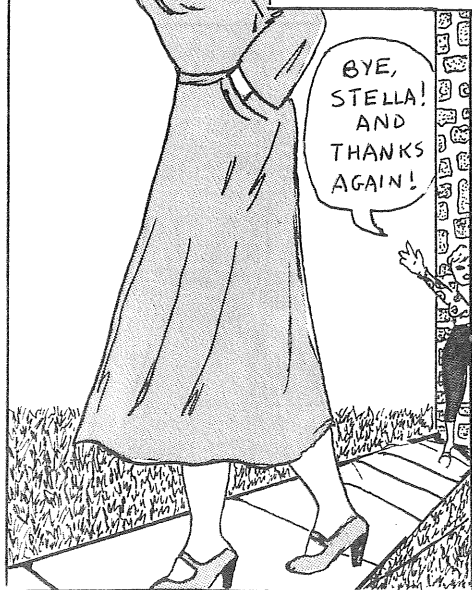
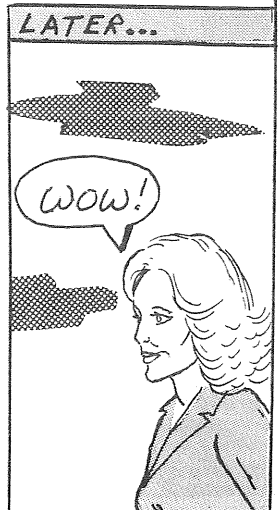
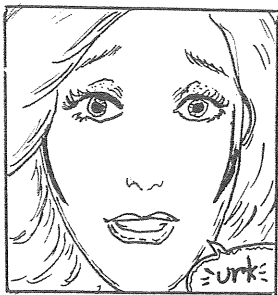
Enjoying our fame, we continued crime-fighting until the mid-sixties, when there was a super-person on every street corner, sometimes even two, in Manhattan. And, frankly, Byron and I were tired.

I also had gotten married, and had a husband to look after, as well as the possibility of children. We ended our long careers, and we're enjoying our retirement, though I must confess that the memories of the old days do seem to make the house seem a little confining, and the seat a little uncomfortable, and my mind wants to move constantly.

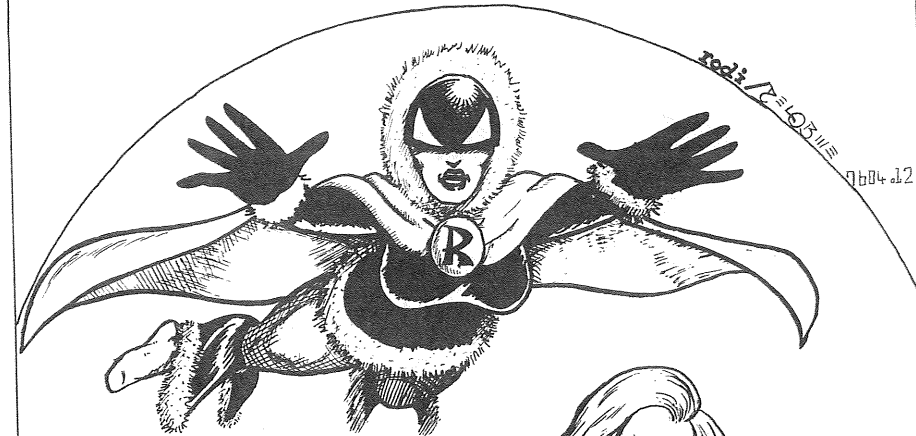
But, let's face it... I'm old. I'll never see 88 again!



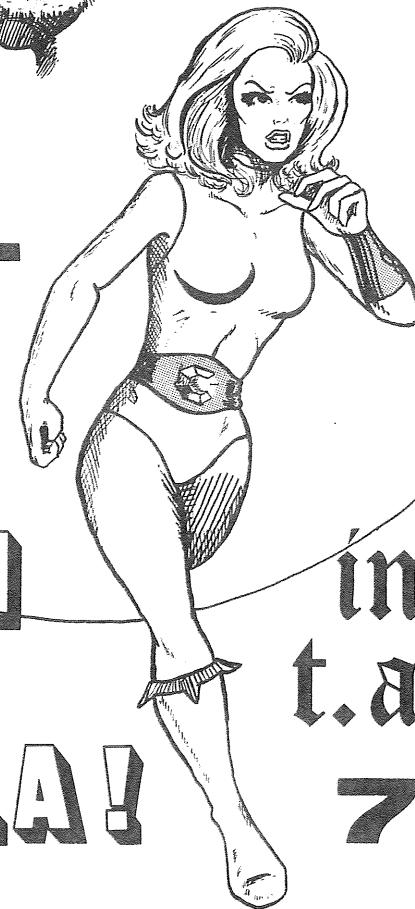




# COMING:



# TA'S FIRST TEAM- UP... RAVEN & STELLA!



in  
t.a.  
7



NO... NOT HERE...



NOW I REMEMBER! THE COVER TO THE ADVENTURESS IS DUE IN TODAY'S MAIL.

CALL T.O.R. 7:06



MR. TANNER?



I JUST CALLED THE POST OFFICE -- THERE IS NO MAIL DELIVERY TODAY. I'LL HAVE TO MAIL THESE PACKAGES LATER.

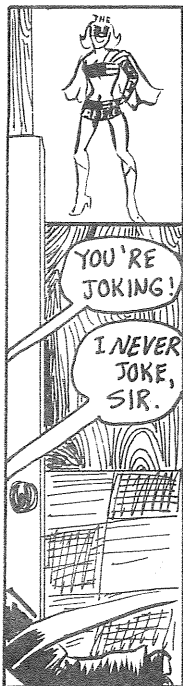


NO MAIL DELIVERY?! WHY?



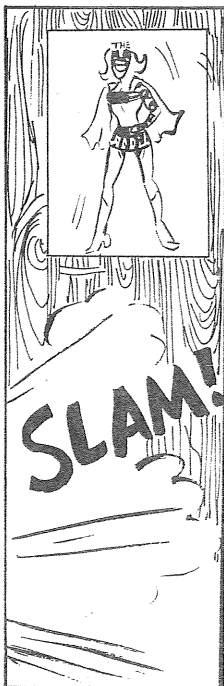
BECAUSE THERE'S NO POST OFFICE. IT'S GONE.

WHAT? NO MAIL! NO COVER! NO ADVENTURESS! NO... POST OFFICE?



YOU'RE JOKING!

I NEVER JOKE, SIR.



SLAM!



OOOPS!

ChEfaC in: \* BEE CAREFUL!

①



OH MY ACHING... WELL, I'D BETTER GET DOWN TO THE POST OFFICE AND SEE IF I CAN HELP.

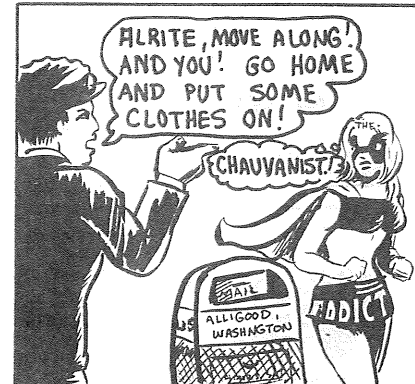


MIGHT AS WELL RUN. HANGING ON A WALL ISN'T GOOD FOR A GIRL'S FIGURE!



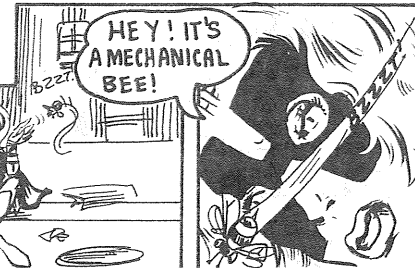
AND - AT THE POST OFFICE...

WHAT POST OFFICE?



ALRITE, MOVE ALONG, AND YOU! GO HOME AND PUT SOME CLOTHES ON!

CHAUVANIST!



NOT A CLUE... OH, I JUST WANTED TO BE A POSTER. ANYWAY. DUNNO HOW I GOT INTO THIS CRIME-BUSTING BIZ... GO 'WAY, BEE!

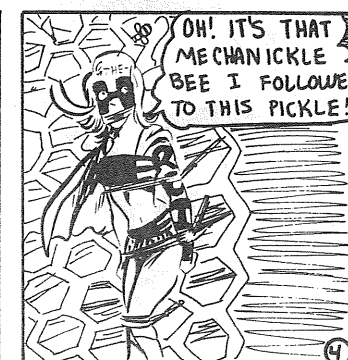
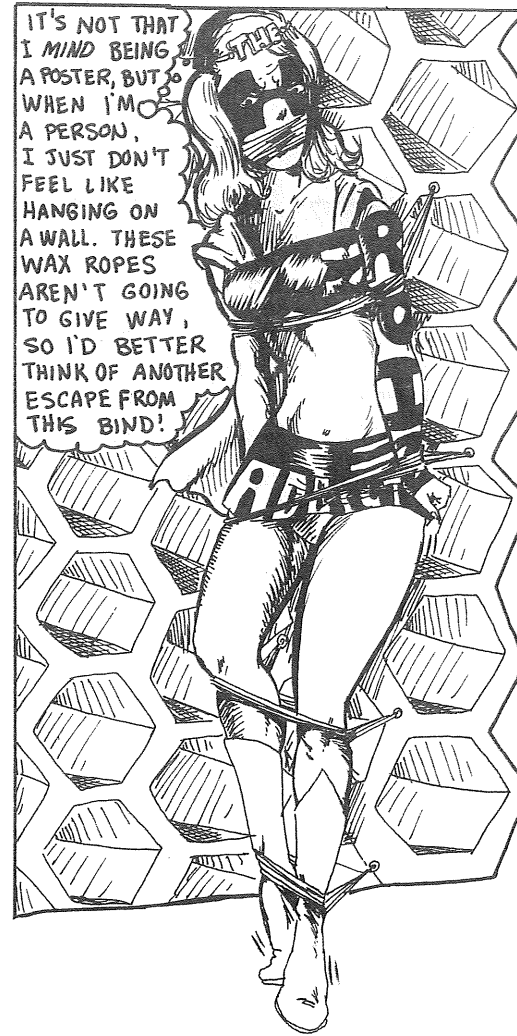
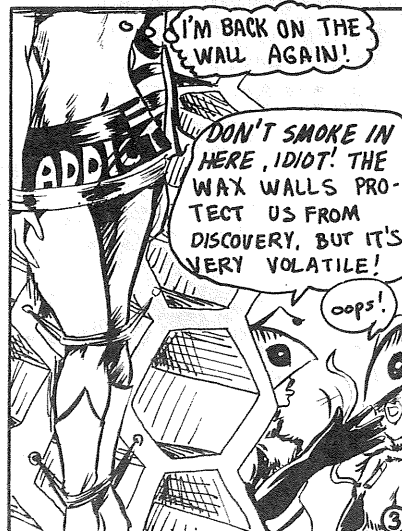
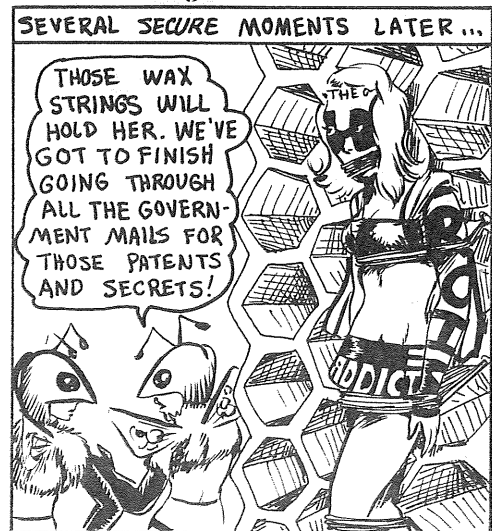
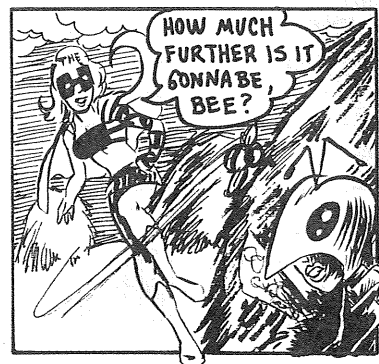
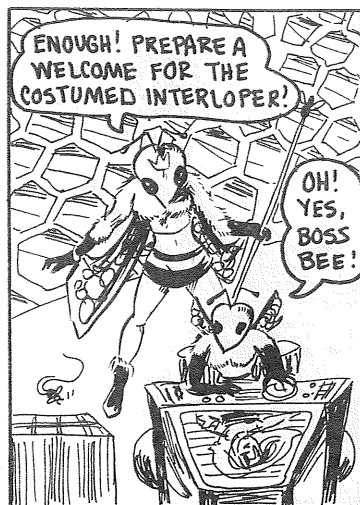
HEY! IT'S A MECHANICAL BEE!

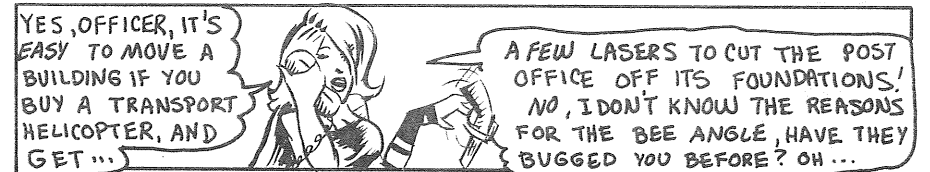
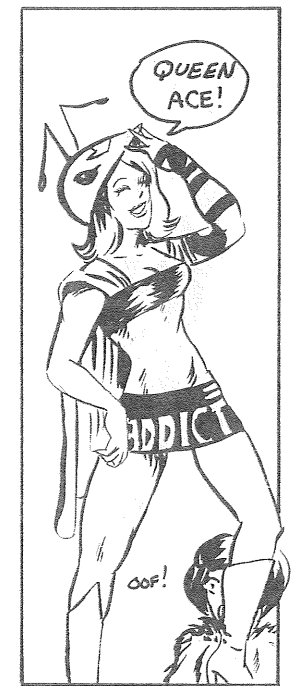
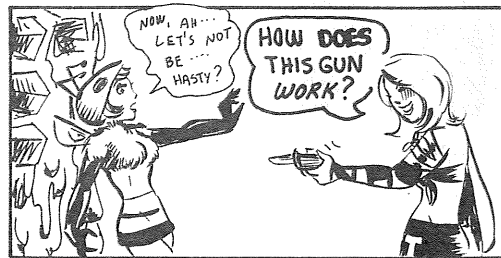
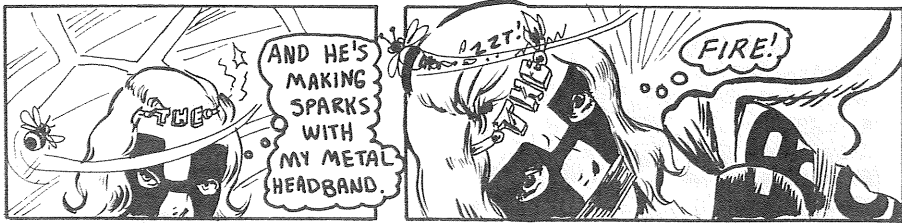


HOLA! COME BACK, BUG!

HOME TO THE HIVE? WELL, TELL THEM COMPANY'S COMING!

②





# THE EPIC OF INANNA

A SUMERIAN LEGEND RECREATED BY FRANK TRAVELIN, JR.

PART I: TO ENTER THE NETHERWORLD BUT NOT...

THE THE BEGINS IN THE DAYS WHEN THE GODS STILL DWELLED IN THE GREAT CITIES NOW INHABITED BY MAN

(INANNA) COME OUT OF THAT TRANCE!

THE WORLD HAD BECOME COLD AND BARREN WHEN SHE HAD WITHDRAWN... SO WISE TRIED TO APPEASE HER

THEN MOST OF THE GODS LIVED IN ETERNAL JOY (ENKI, PLEASE, I...)

(WHAT CAN YOU POSSIBLY BE DISSATISFIED ABOUT? YOU HAVE BEEN PROCLAIMED HIGHER THEN ALL... AND YOU AMONG ALL THE OTHER GODDESSES HAVE BEEN GRANTED THE RIGHT TO WED DUMUZI, BEAUTIFUL GOD OF FERTILITY)

IF NOT, I MAY BECOME CARELESS

I WANT TO BE QUEEN..

OF HEAVEN!

(NO GOD OBJECTED TO THE UNORTHODOX ASCENSION..)

HEY DUMZI, WEVE GOT A NEW..UM, SOCIAL STATUS

WITH THE POWER OF THE DEVASTATRIX!

M-MY, WHAT A LOVELY DAY FOR CORONATION

SINCE NONE WAS MORE FIT TO RULE THEN SHE!

AND SO, INANNA, WITH DUMUZI AT HER RIGHT SIDE, REIGNED OVER HEAVEN AND EARTH WITH WISDOM AND COMPASSION...



BUT, AFTER A FEW THOUSAND YEARS

IF I'VE WOUNDED YOUR PRIDE SO, WHY DONT YOU FIND MORE APPRECIATIVE COMPANY!

THAT'S NOT A BAD IDEA!

GOOD-BYE!



EVEN A GOD MAY GROW RESTLESS

HAVE SOME NECTAR, HUSBAND!



HOW MAGNANIMOUS OF YOU, 'WIFE'!

OH, DIANE, SOMETIMES I FEEL THAT I'M LOSING HIM!

THAT'S RIDICULOUS, LADY. NONE IS MORE DESIROUS THEN YOU!

NO! NOT THIS TIME DEATH SHALL NOT ADD MY HUSBAND TO HER OBSCENE COLLECTION.. NOT IF I HAVE TO..

THAT'S TRUE, BUT..

DEAD! POOR CHILD... SO YOUNG



VINA! WHAT IS WRONG?

POISON ENTERED THROUGH HER SKIN INSTANTLY.. POISON IN THE NECTAR. THEN DUMUZI!

ENTER HELL MYSELF!

AND SO FROM THE GREAT ABOVE SHE SET HER MIND TO WARD THE GREAT BELOW \* SUMERIAN TABLET

YES, THIS IS SOMETHING I MUST AT LEAST TRY.

NO... WAIT!

WHAT'S WRONG? I HAVEN'T TIME TO... PLEASE, YOU CAN'T ENTER THE GHASTLY UNDERWORLD TOTALLY UNPREPARED!

DO YOU THINK ME SOME FRIGHT?

LISTEN, EVEN YOU MIGHT NOT SURVIVE THESE TORMENTS UN-UNAIDED

ALRIGHT, THEN, NINSHUBUR, IF I DO NOT RETURN WITHIN 3 DAYS, THEN YOU ARE TO SET UP A LAMENT FOR ME BY THE RUINS..

WHO COULD KNOW THIS BETTER..

THEN I?

...AND IF HE DOES NOT COME TO MY RESCUE, THEN SURELY I DON'T DESERVE TO BE AMONG THE IMMORTALS

AND IN HER SHIP OF GOLD...

THEN GO TO NIPE AND ASK ENLIL TO SEND AID TO ME IF HE IGNORES YOU, GO TOUR AND INVOKE NAN-NA IF HE REFUSES, THEN ENTREAT ENKI AT ERIDU

TILL SHE CAME TO AN EVER ENDLESS OCEAN, WHERE UP ON A BARREN ISLAND SAT A TEMPLE OF LAPISLAZULI

WHOSE SKIN HAD NEVER SPARKLED IN THE SUN NOR GLOWED IN MOONLIGHT

MY LADY ABAN HEAVEN, ABANDONED EARTH TO THE NETHER WORLD SHE DESCENDED

INANNA JOURNEYED BEYOND THE LIMITS OF THE LIVING...

THIS IS THE A-BODE 'OF THE DEAD -- HERE THE PHRASE "SILENT AS A TOMB" TAKES ON NEW MEANING.

IT'S ALSO ABOUT AS CHEERFUL AS A CRYPT...

'AH WELL, NOW IS NO TIME FOR...'

A-A MAN! MATERIALIZING IN FRONT OF ME

WHAT LIVING FOOL SEEKS ENTRANCE TO HELL?

'PROCRASTINATION'

I AM THE QUEEN OF HEAVEN, THE PLACE WHERE THE SUN RISES. WHAT HAS LED YOU HERE

I'VE COME TO MOURN THE DEATH OF MY SISTER ERESKIGAL'S HUSBAND!

WAIT!

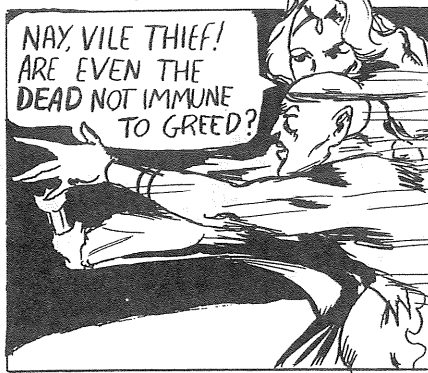
SHORTLY...

OF COURSE LET HER IN!

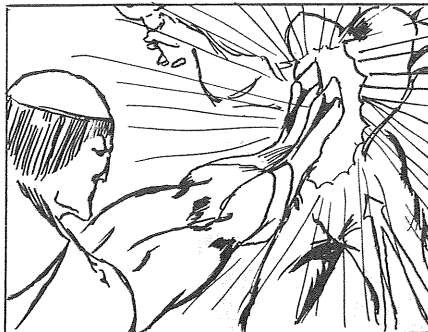
THE DEATH?!.. OF MY HUSBAND.. MY POOR GRIEVING SISTER.. AND ONLY 2000 YEARS LATE



YOU MAY ENTER... AFTER I RELIEVE YOU OF...

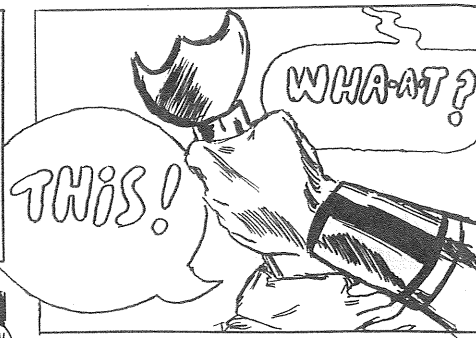


NAY, VILE THIEF! ARE EVEN THE DEAD NOT IMMUNE TO GREED?

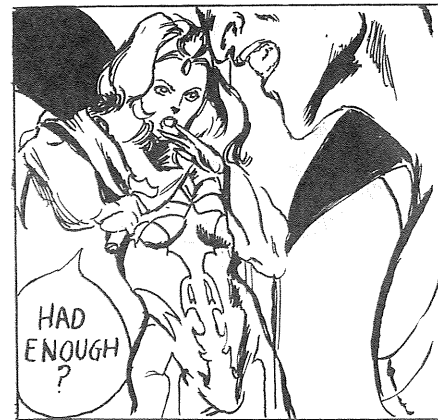


LIVING WITCH! I DO ONLY MY SACRED DUTY!

IT IS YOU WHO BLASPHEME THIS HOLY PLA-OOFFPH



HA HA! NOW, IF YOU WILL STOP THIS ABSURDITY, NETI, I'LL NOT REPORT THIS TO YOUR CRUEL MISTRESS!



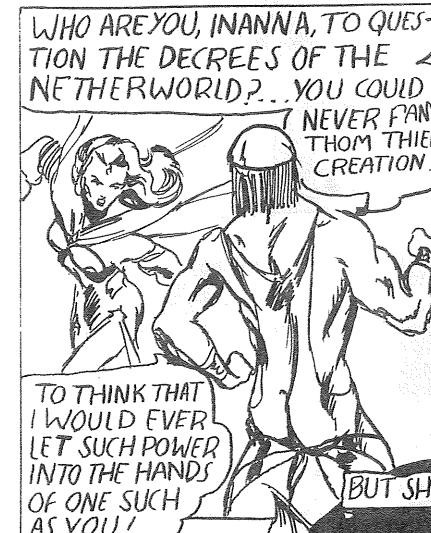
HAD ENOUGH?



NO! NO PAIN CAN EVER FORCE ME TO BETRAY MY LADY'S TRUST!



SO. OMPH.. THIS EVIL GAME IS A WHIM OF MY SISTER

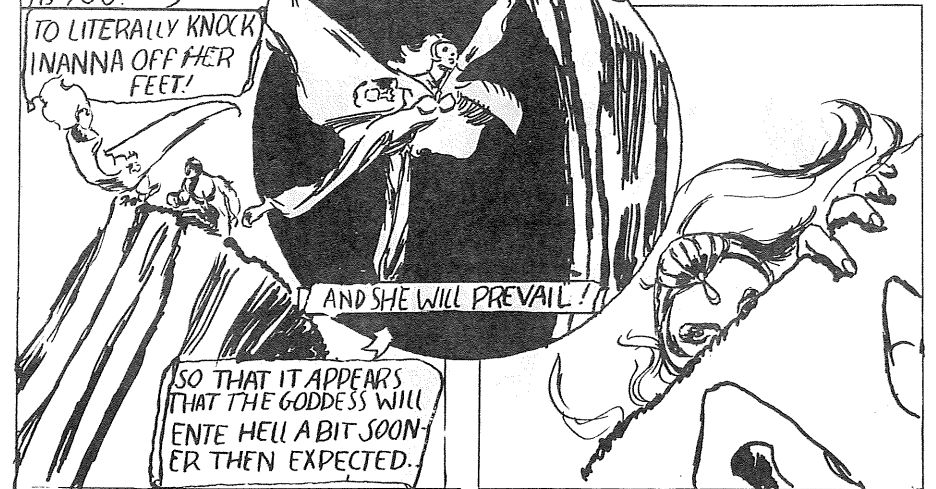


WHO ARE YOU, INANNA, TO QUESTION THE DECREES OF THE NETHERWORLD?... YOU COULD NEVER FEAR THEM THOM THEIR CREATION!

TO THINK THAT I WOULD EVER LET SUCH POWER INTO THE HANDS OF ONE SUCH AS YOU!

BUT SHE IS INANNA...

A BLOW POWERFUL ENOUGH



TO LITERALLY KNOCK INANNA OFF HER FEET!

AND SHE WILL PREVAIL!!

SO THAT IT APPEARS THAT THE GODDESS WILL ENTE HELL A BIT SOONER THEN EXPECTED.



# SKULL GODDESS

BY JEFF THOMPSON & TOM LUTH



PART TWO

Her vision was limited by the opaque mask which allowed only minimal eye-holes. Yet her sight did not deceive her when it perceived the chaotic scene around her. Mitch Owens, dazed, contorted into a post-impact position on the hospital floor, a crimson-splotted island in a dazzling sea of broken glass—evidence of her entrance. Marilyn Leonard and Mark Owens, their previous emotions temporarily put aside and replaced by the proverbial open-mouth grimace. A drawing, white-clad crowd.

The woman removed the loathsome skull mask and revealed her true countenance to be very beautiful indeed, as was her voice when she spoke. "I have come to vanquish Skull Goddess. I, Countess Cranium, am the true skull-faced crime-fighter. In order to remain unique and frightening to the criminals here and in my country, I must deal with this imposter."

Dr. Jerry Marlowe, still in his surgical garb, had appeared and was standing near Marilyn and a revived Mitch. "Imposter?" Mark Owens cried. "I've never heard of you, and Skull Goddess really does have a skull-face."

"Jerry," Marilyn whispered to her lover, "Is the Skull Goddess woman all right?"

Jerry stared at Countess Cranium and then replied, "They've taken her to the recovery room."

The bizarre costumed woman heard the whisper and donned her mask, exclaiming, "Then that is my destination!" She pushed past Jerry and dashed down the antiseptic corridor in the direction of the recovery room. Jerry, Mark, and a host of orderlies ludicrously pursued her.

"What the hell do you make of that?" Mitch Owens asked Marilyn Leonard. "How did she even know in which direction the recovery room was, for crying out loud?"

"I'm more concerned about the woman that weirdo's going to try to hurt. She's Mark's — Mitch, you always avoid her. The two of you have only been together briefly a few times, Mark told me. You really do distrust Skull Goddess, don't you?"

"If you knew what I know about that Halloween lady you would too, Marilyn."

"Oh, my God," weakly whispered the man attending Skull Goddess upon sight of Countess Cranium careening toward the virtual look-alike lying

unmoving on the bed. Dr. Jerry Marlowe, a frantic Mark Owens, and others



NEXT

THE DESCENT INTO HELL

☆☆ EPESHKIGAL ☆☆

PLUS MUCH MUCH MORE!

COMMENTS? CRITICIZMS? PLEASE WRITE. 25 STEGMAN TERR. JERSEY CITY, NJ.



poured into the room after her like freshly-spewed lava from a volcano.

"Get out of the way!" Countess Cranium roared at the doctor. Her voice resounding within the mask sounded eerie. Jerry and Mark's flailing arms attempted to grab the strange Countess. She stared down at the woman in bed. "This is too easy, to coin a cliché," she murmured to herself.

"Don't do anything to that woman!" the doctor shouted, regaining his courage. "She's dead!"

"Dead?" Countess Cranium echoed. The mask almost made a second echo. She ripped it off. "How did she die? When did she die?" Mark registered a pained expression as the Countess voiced his questions.

"I suppose the bullet-removal surgery simply was too much for her. Dr. Marlowe, see for yourself. I find no heartbeat."

Jerry gingerly stepped forward and pressed his stethoscope against Skull Goddess' breast. The instrument lingered there for an electric moment. Finally he said, "I can't find one either."

Suddenly Countess Cranium felt strong hands seize her from behind. A look over her shoulder told her that the police had been summoned and an emissary of said institution was gripping her now. "Don't struggle, Miss Whatever-You-Are. You'll have to come with me."

"No! You can't arrest me! I—"

"You disturbed the peace of this hospital — rorally. Now will you accompany me to the police station, please? That Batman getup suggests that you'll be good company."

"Joke all you want, but you won't be able to hold me," retorted Countess Cranium as she was being "escorted" out of the room. "My country..."

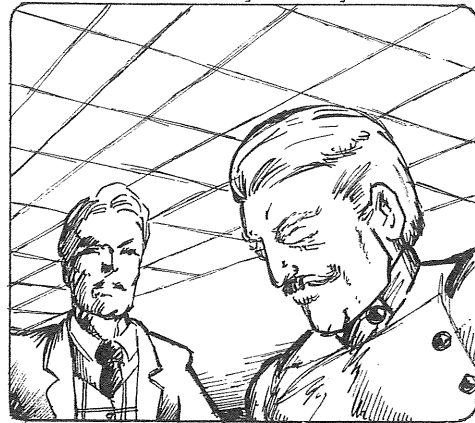
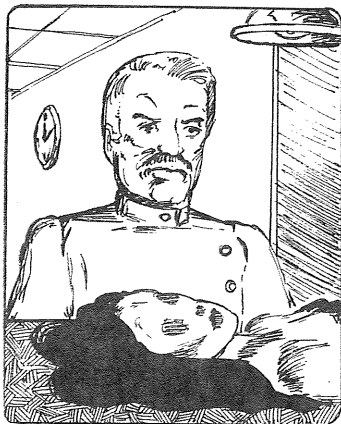
"...Better than you do," Mark was telling Jerry, "And I also know that she isn't really dead."

"Mark," began Jerry.

"No, listen to me," Mark pleaded while the unwanted gatering dispersed. "This has happened to her before. It's only some kind of deep trance. She'll start exhibiting signs of life again in a few minutes."

"What are you trying to sell me? Astral projection? Self-hypnosis?" Jerry asked Mark. He glanced at the still form on the bed.

"I don't really know myself,



Jerry. It's just some queer quirk about her—another...one."

"How many times has she done this in your presence?" Jerry asked, still incredulous.

"I would say every third or fourth time we are together. I've only know her for two years and she's reluctant to talk about her past. Anyway, she'd be, ah, normal and then all of a sudden she'll be lifeless like that. But, fifteen or twenty minutes at the most later, she'll stir and—"

"— And say, 'What happened? Where am I?'" Jerry asked.

"Yes," Mark replied, much more serious than Jerry. "How did y—"

"Damn it, I don't know what to think, Mark."

This whole thing is so freaky! Have you ever asked her what happens when she goes into one of these trances?"

"She says she doesn't remember," Mark said slowly, "But I wonder if—"

"Well this certainly is something to wonder about," Jerry interrupted him again. Turning his eyes towards the skull goddess on the bed, he added, "And she most certainly is someone to wonder about."



"In the local news, certain citizens downtown this afternoon witnessed a grim life-and-death display several stories above street level. The enigmatic, almost frightening, woman known as Skull Goddess— whose photograph you see projected behind the newsdesk and me— was shot by an escaping criminal while she was attempting to apprehend him and his partner, who both had robbed the Developers' Security National Bank on the first floor of the forty-story GF Center. Eyewitnesses reported how Skull Goddess swooped down upon the fleeing robbers by swinging on a cord

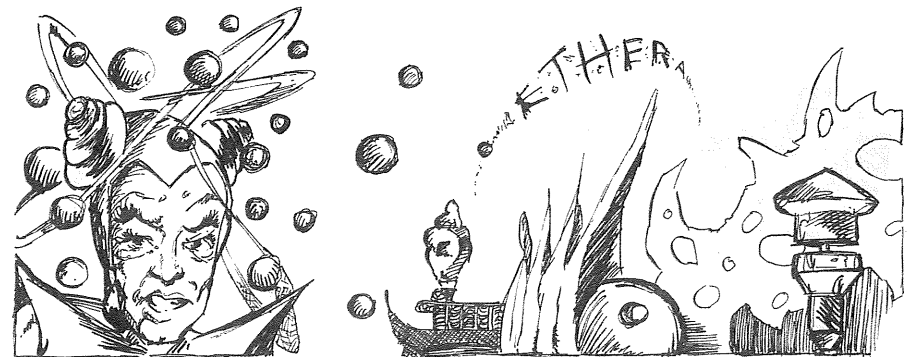
attached to something many stories above Wilson Street and was shot at fairly close range by one of the gun-wielding robbers. The pair then escaped. An ambulance soon arrived and transported the heroic victim to..."

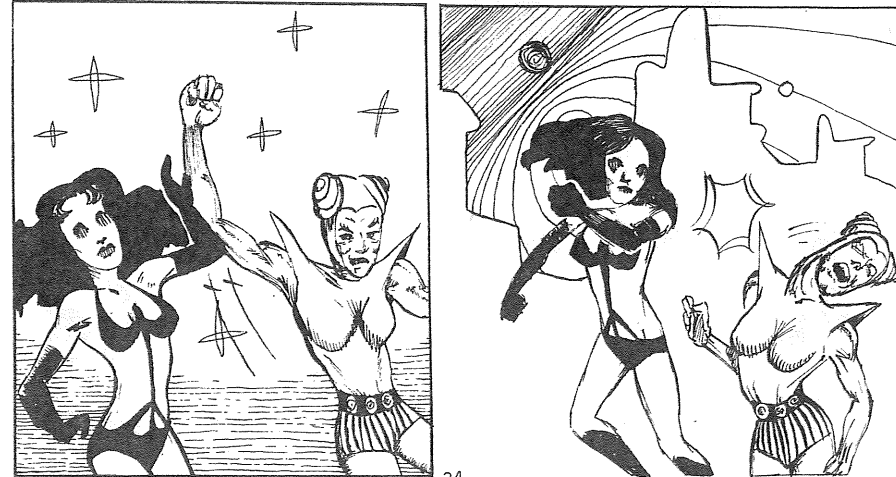
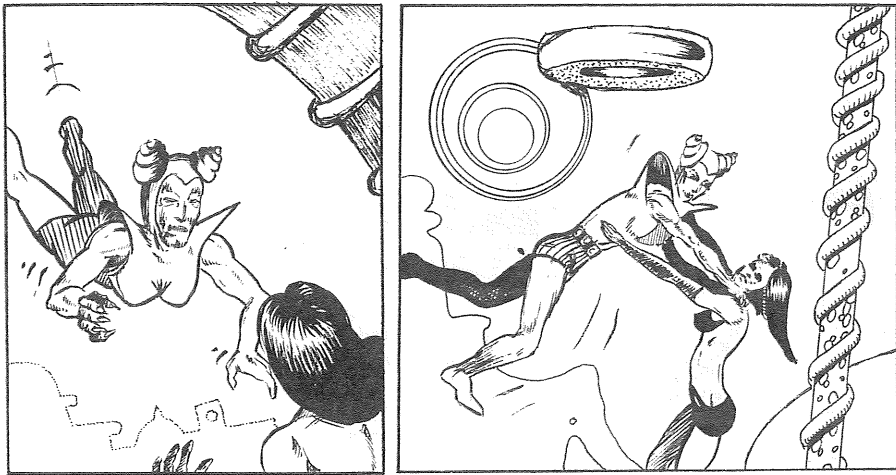
He did not hear any more of the newscaster's words. He sat obliviously staring at the close-up, full-length photograph of the woman whose desirable body was marred by the grotesquerie which was her face. A sardonic smile manipulated his scabrous lips. He was formulating a plan of action.

"How intriguingly strange. She almost has two distinct sets of molecules, cells, and atoms. They are mysteriously dually divided enough to enable some of them to form and animate a body here, while enough stay on the other plane in order for a material frame to be left there. My taking her now is almost too easy!"

The wheezing, cracking voice opened Skull Goddess' eyes. Her mind exploded in inaudible screams; she knew that she was back in Ethera. When she saw the gnome, Hesbolo, hovering over her prostrate figure, she bolted to her feet.

Skull Goddess braced herself for battle. "You can't judge a book by its cover" was an axiom which applied to Hesbolo's deceiving appearance. Her seemingly rheumatoid body somehow stored the agility and power of a berserk tigress. Hesbolo flung off the rainbow headdress and fully revealed a face almost as distasteful as Skull Goddess'.





Skull Goddess stared at Hesbolo's crumpled body. Was she dead? No such luck.

"I've got to be very cautious," Skull Goddess remarked aloud. "I never know when my 'self' will leave this body; it could happen anytime, anytime. I can't risk Hesbolo finding my defenseless body again. Where can I go in order to be safe during my consciousness — and unconsciousness — in Ethera? Where?"



"It's been nineteen or twenty minutes now, Mark." Dr. Jerry Marlowe turned Mark Owens' face towards his own. "Do you still think —"  
 "Yes!" Mark cried almost maniacally. "She will revive. She must!"

A smile played upon his lips as he noiselessly entered Skull Goddess' hospital room, equipment in hand. Those two men's backs were to him; he knew that he had to eliminate the men in order to accomplish what he came here to do.

+++ TO BE CONTINUED +++



