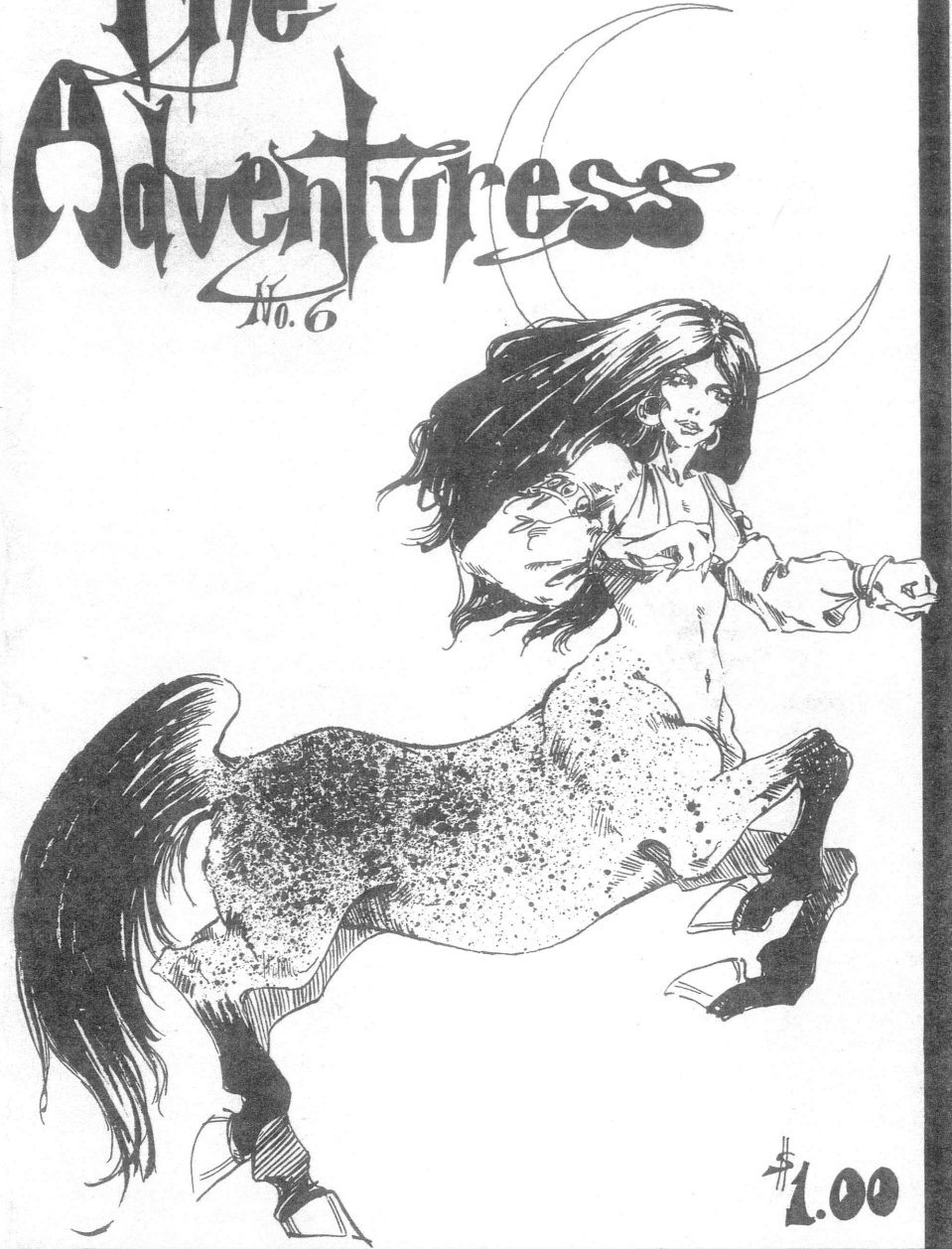


Lola Dowling © 1977

The Adventuress

No. 6



\$1.00

THE COMICS HEROINES FAN CLUB

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Single issues, \$1.25; 2 or more, \$1.00 each

THE ADVENTURESS #6, Spring 1978. Published quarterly or whenever time, money and material permit by Steven R. Johnson. Single copies: \$1.25 via first class mail; \$1.10 via third class mail. All original material is covered by first publication laws.



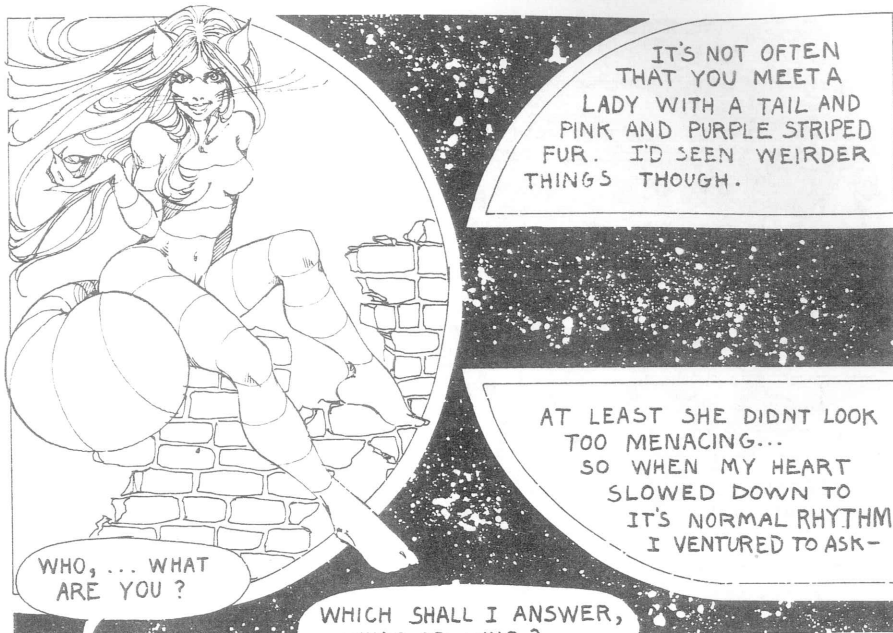
DON'T ASK ME WHY THEY NICK-NAMED THE PLANET H.Z.G., PROBABLY TO SHORTEN SOME TECHNICAL TERM FOR A CIVILIZATION THAT DESTROYED ITSELF.

NOW THE PLANET WAS RETURNING TO LIFE. THE DREADFUL RADIOACTIVITY SLACKED OFF, AND SMALL PARTIES OF EXPLORERS AND SCOUTS WERE SENT DOWN. WHATEVER WAR HAD TORN THAT LAND APART HAD LEFT LITTLE INTACT.

IT WASN'T EXACTLY MY CHOICE TO GO DOWN TO THE PLANET SURFACE, ENDLESS RUBBLE IS NOT AN ENCOURAGING SIGHT. BUT IT'S BETTER THAN BEING ON K.P.



I WASN'T EXPECTING COMPANY...



IT'S NOT OFTEN THAT YOU MEET A LADY WITH A TAIL AND PINK AND PURPLE STRIPED FUR. I'D SEEN WEIRDER THINGS THOUGH.

AT LEAST SHE DIDNT LOOK TOO MENACING... SO WHEN MY HEART SLOWED DOWN TO IT'S NORMAL RHYTHM I VENTURED TO ASK-

WHO, ... WHAT ARE YOU ?

WHICH SHALL I ANSWER, WHAT OR WHO ?

UM... EITHER, PLEASE.



I AM GARROTT'S CAT

OR DIDNT YOU REALISE THAT ?



WHERE DID YOU COME FROM ?

HERE, THERE EVERYWHERE.

AH, THE FIRST STEP ON THE ROAD TO ENLIGHTENMENT!



SWELL.



YOU SPEAK IN NONSENSE !

EXACTLY. HOW ELSE SHALL A CHESHIRE CAT ACT ?



YOU DONT EVEN READ ON MY SCANNER, WHAT TYPE OF CREATURE ... ?

HUMANS, ... ALWAYS POSING PUZZLES FOR YOURSELVES.

I MUST BE GOING MAD.



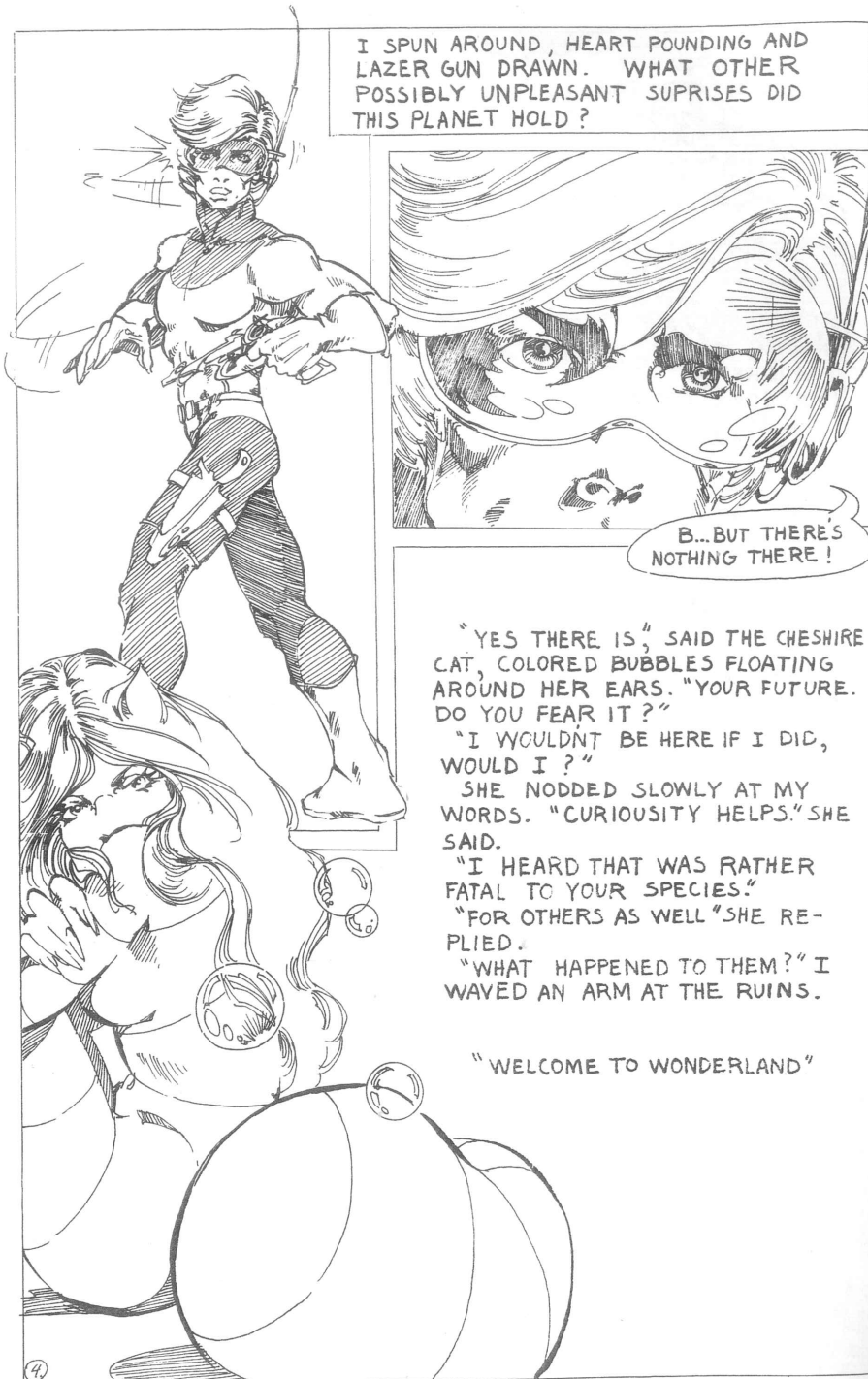
YOU FEAR UNPREDICTABLE THINGS, AS DID THEY ALL. DO YOU FEAR ME ?

NO.



DO YOU FEAR THAT ?

WHAT ?



I SPUN AROUND, HEART POUNDING AND LAZER GUN DRAWN. WHAT OTHER POSSIBLY UNPLEASANT SUPPRISES DID THIS PLANET HOLD ?



B...BUT THERE'S NOTHING THERE !

"YES THERE IS," SAID THE CHESHIRE CAT, COLORED BUBBLES FLOATING AROUND HER EARS. "YOUR FUTURE. DO YOU FEAR IT?"

"I WOULDN'T BE HERE IF I DID, WOULD I?"

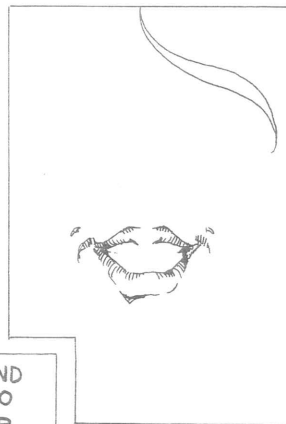
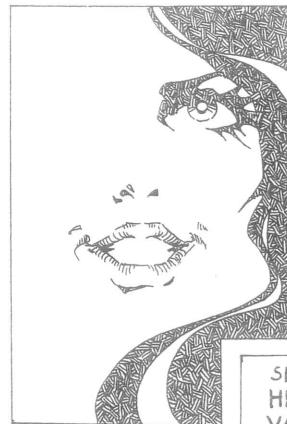
SHE NODDED SLOWLY AT MY WORDS. "CURIOSITY HELPS." SHE SAID.

"I HEARD THAT WAS RATHER FATAL TO YOUR SPECIES."

"FOR OTHERS AS WELL" SHE REPLIED.

"WHAT HAPPENED TO THEM?" I WAVED AN ARM AT THE RUINS.

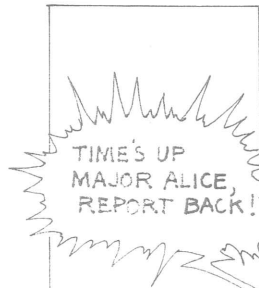
"WELCOME TO WONDERLAND"



SHE FADED SLOWLY AWAY, AND HER SMILE WAS THE LAST TO VANISH. BUT THE LAUGHTER LASTED FOR A LONG, LONG TIME, ... ECHOING ABOUT AS IF I WERE IN AN EMPTY ROOM.

INSIDE THE PROTECTIVE GOGGLES, THE COM LINK BUZZED.

... AND STEPPED BACK THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS.



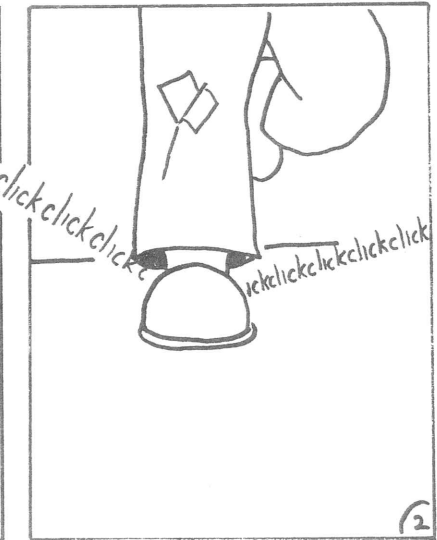
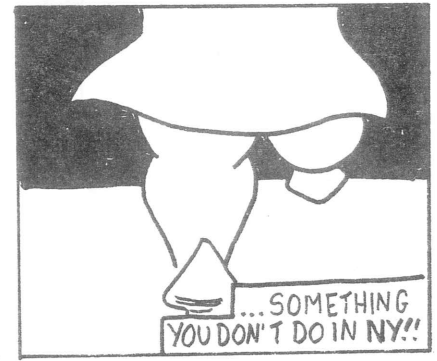
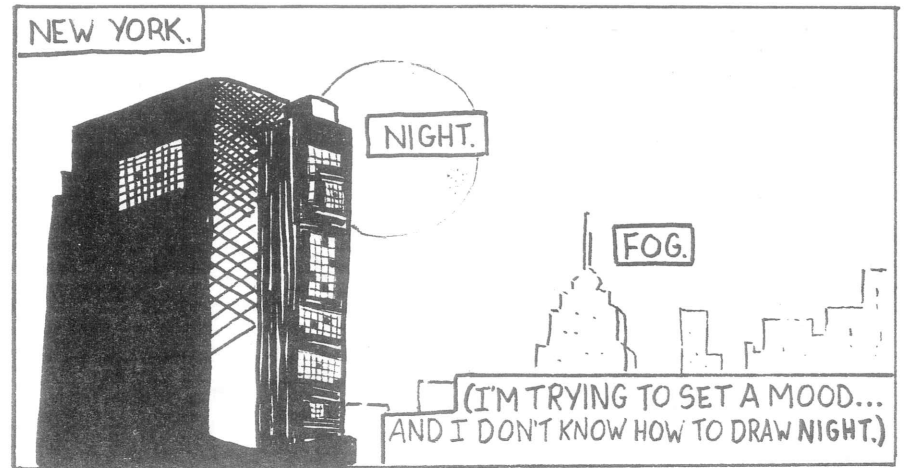
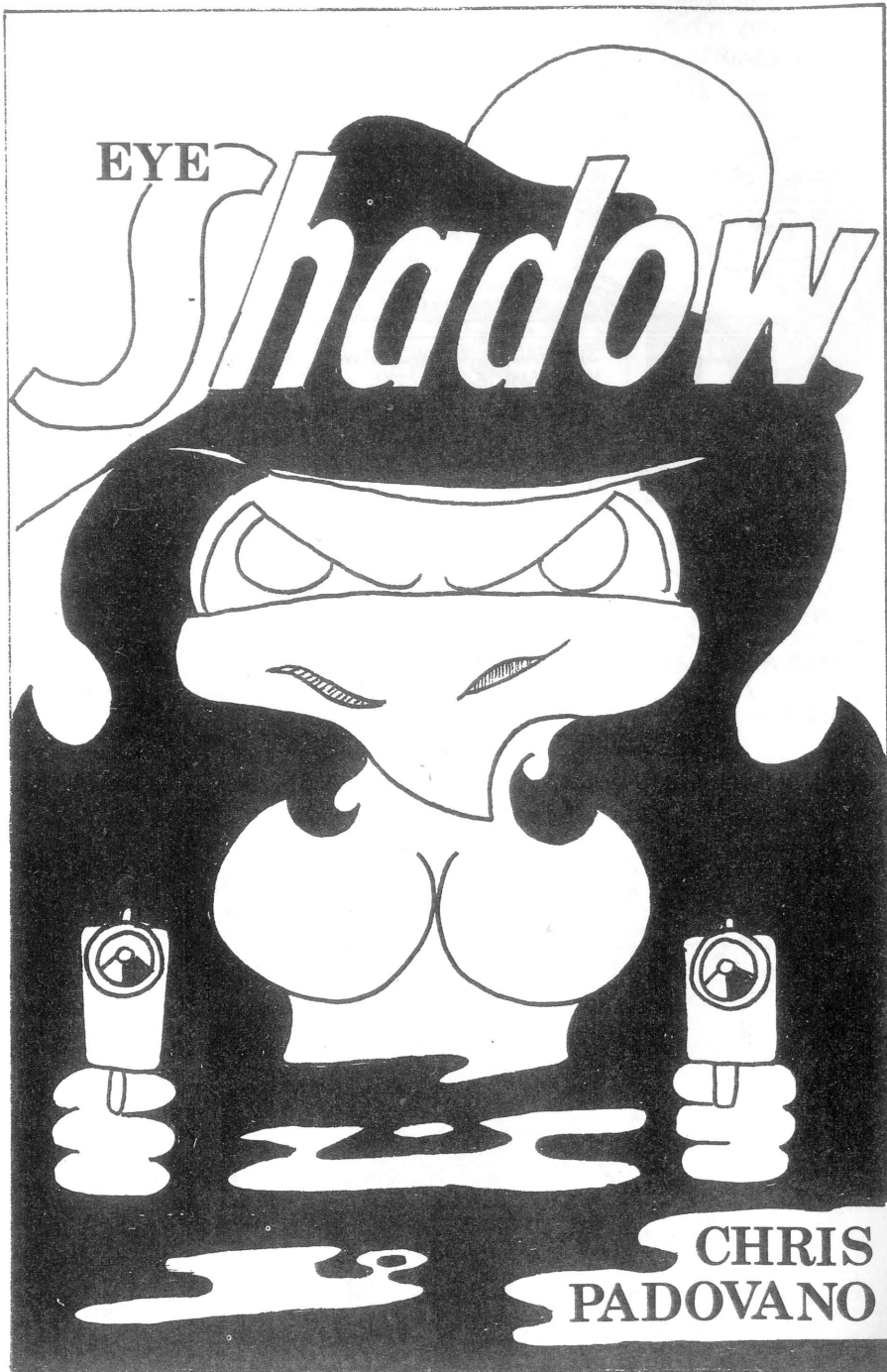
TIME'S UP MAJOR ALICE, REPORT BACK!

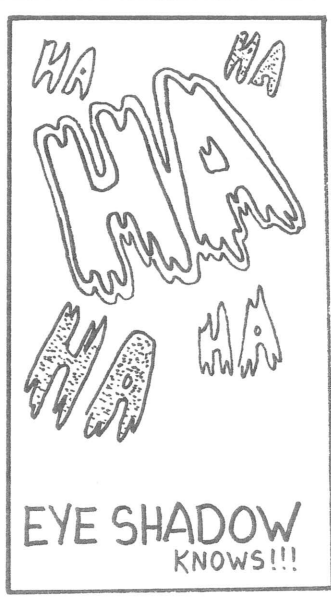
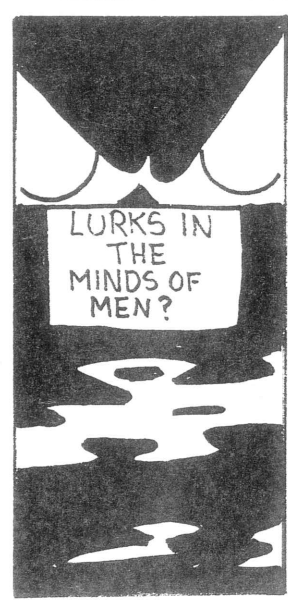
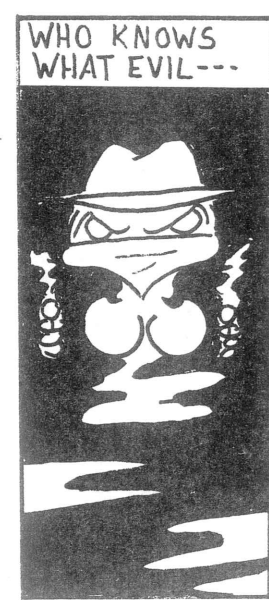
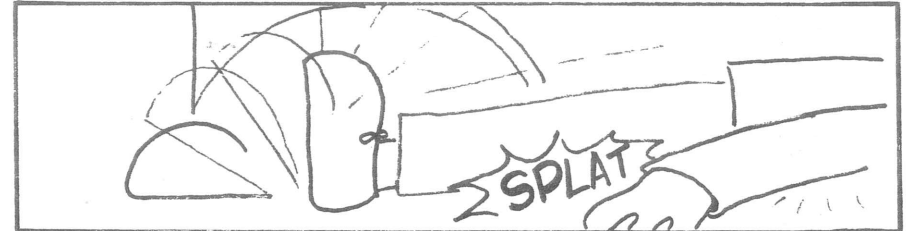
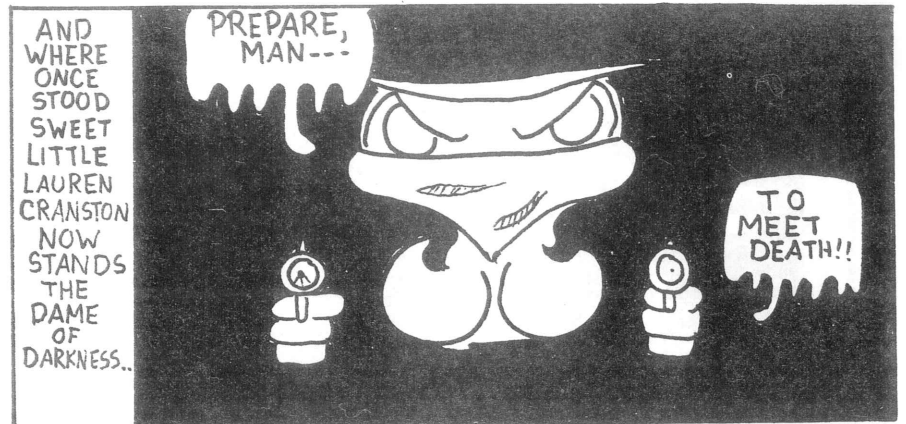
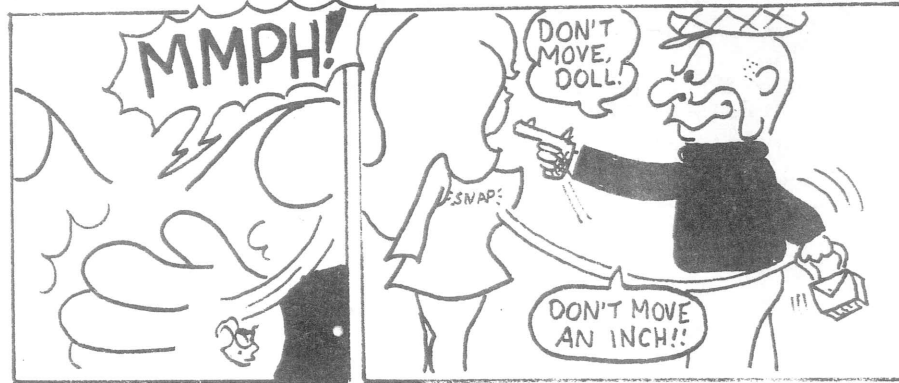
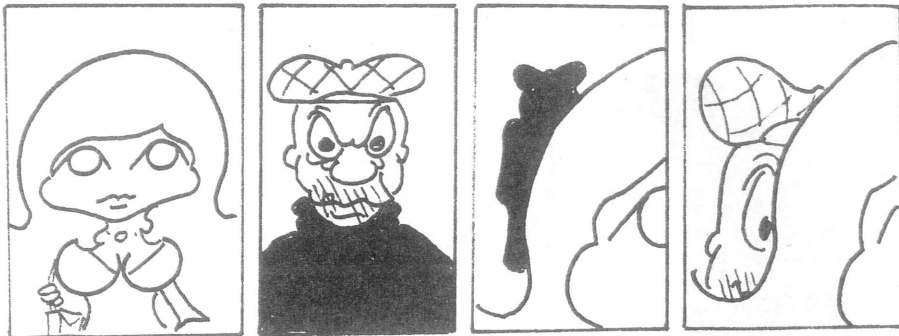


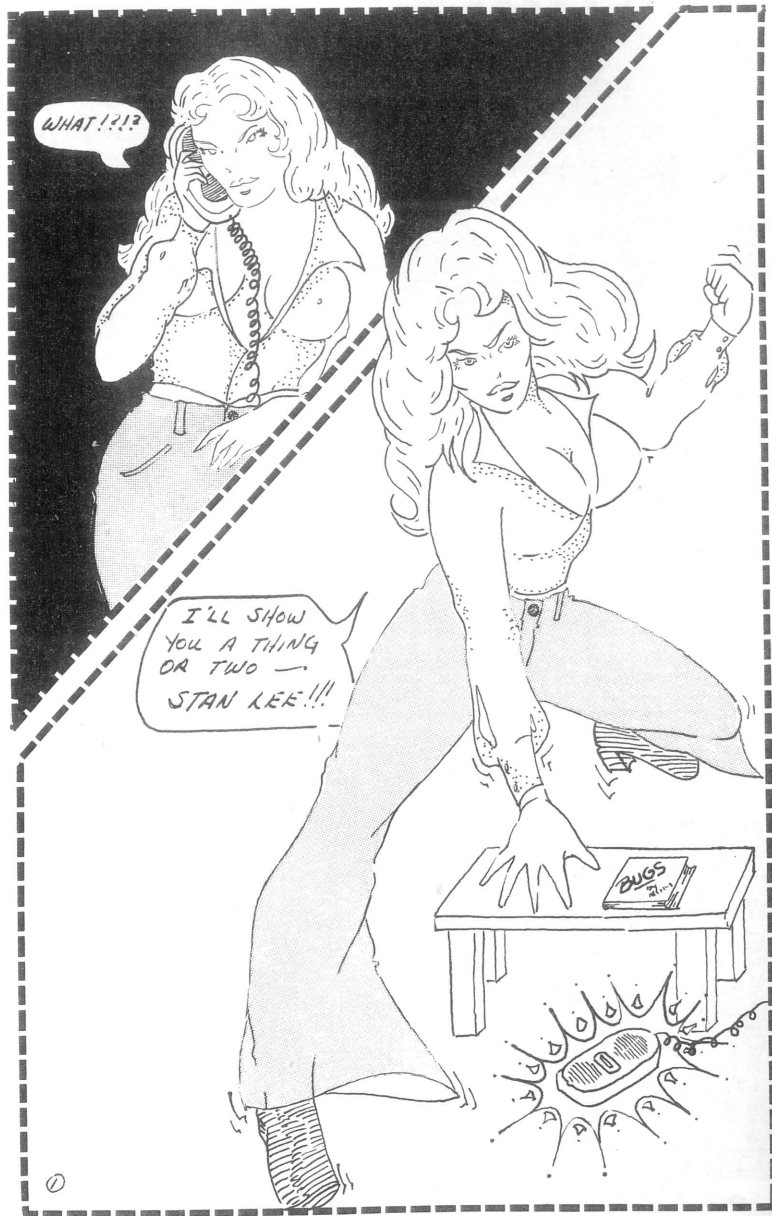
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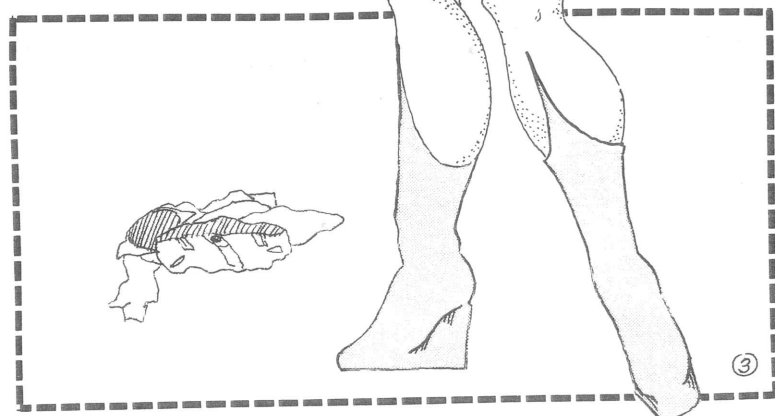
I ACTIVATED THE RETURN-TELEPORT BUTTON,











SKULL GODDESS

BY JEFF THOMPSON & TOM LUTH

The story so far: A beautiful young woman named Aphrodite was confined to a disreputable asylum because of her strange molecular ability to maintain two different physical bodies in two different realms — while her unpredictable consciousness drifted back and forth between the planes — Earth and the bizarre Ethera, inhabited by Hesbolo, a crone bent on capturing Aphrodite's Ethera body and learning the secret of molecular duality for her own sinister ends. Because of Aphrodite's cellular instability, when electrodes were placed on her head during an electric shock therapy session at the Earth sanitarium, the woman's skin "melted" and reformed into a hideous, skull-like visage!

Dubbed Skull Goddess by the taunting Hesbolo, Aphrodite has found a tenuous love on Earth with an understanding attorney named Mark Owens — although Mark's cynical brother, Mitch Owens, despises her. At this moment, Skull Goddess' lifeless Earth body has been wounded by a gunshot and is lying in the city's Hamilton Memorial Hospital, an ultra-modern facility built far out over the Ferris River. However, her body has just been disturbed in some way by Bruno Adrian, a grotesque-looking man carrying a large hypodermic! In order to get to Skull Goddess, Adrian has subdued — perhaps permanently! — Mark Owens and his friend, Dr. Jerry Marlowe. Will Skull Goddess' consciousness return from Ethera to Earth in time to save the men — and herself?

Chapter 4

In Ethera, Skull Goddess stared wide-eyed at Hesbolo, who had enveloped them both in an enchanted sphere. The witch resorted to the vernacular of Earth and declared, "Well, my dear, 'alone at last'!" You will remain my, ah, guest until I can duplicate your power of dualism. I need it more than you do, you ugly Skull Goddess!" ***

Before Skull Goddess could raise her hand to Hesbolo, she sat up in her hospital bed and observed the carnage before her — Mark Owens, unconscious on the floor, and Dr. Jerry Marlowe, writhing in an imperfect circle of crimson. Skull Goddess gasped, "Hesbolo has my Ethera body, but now I've got to figure out what could have happened around my body on Earth! Mark!" She uttered a cry of pain as her gunshot wound made itself known upon her leap from the bed. As she gingerly removed the IV tube from her right arm, she felt a tiny trickle near her gunshot wound. Ignoring it, she fought her feeling of weakness and pressed the call button for help.

Skull Goddess carressed Mark's forehead as she mentally asked herself, *Why hasn't someone heard something and come to help before now? How long have I been away from this world? And when it's time to go back to Ethera, where — and in what condition — will I find my body there?*

Mark Owens stirred and awakened as Skull Goddess heard a frantic male voice in the corridor yell something about hearing gunshots. Instants later, Mitch Owens and Marilyn Leonard, Jerry Marlowe's sweetheart, burst into the room. Marilyn shrieked and dashed to her unconscious, gunshot-wounded lover. "My God, he's going to die if he loses any more blood!" Marilyn wailed. "Somebody get another doctor!"

Gritting her teeth and trying to ignore her own pain, Skull Goddess announced, "I've

already called for a nurse, Ms. Leonard. It's a big hospital, but the nurse'll get more help fast once she gets here.

"Darling, how can you be standing?" a kneeling Mark asked Aphrodite.

"Well, uh, this is an emergency," she replied. "We have to think about you and Jerry now."

Mitch Owens stared at the supposedly-wounded Skull Goddess and at his brother, who now was on his feet next to his beloved and patting the back of his head. Mitch exclaimed, "For God's sake, you crazy woman, how much more are you going to do to us?"

"What are you talking about, Mitch?" Mark Owens asked his younger brother.

"Mark, you're so taken in by this witch that you'll never understand! She's out to get your money or something — but, lady, why did you think you had to beat up my brother and shoot Jerry Marlowe?"

Skull Goddess was speechless. Mark retorted, "You paranoid son-of-a-gun! Skull Goddess didn't do this to Jerry and me. She was lying in that bed when somebody came up from behind us and —"

With an almost maniacal glint in his eyes, Mitch screamed, "You're through hurting my brother and me and our friends! You go back to where you came from or I'll kill you!" With that, he shoved Skull Goddess mightily and she went sprawling backwards until she hit the hard floor on her side and rolled over, unmoving.

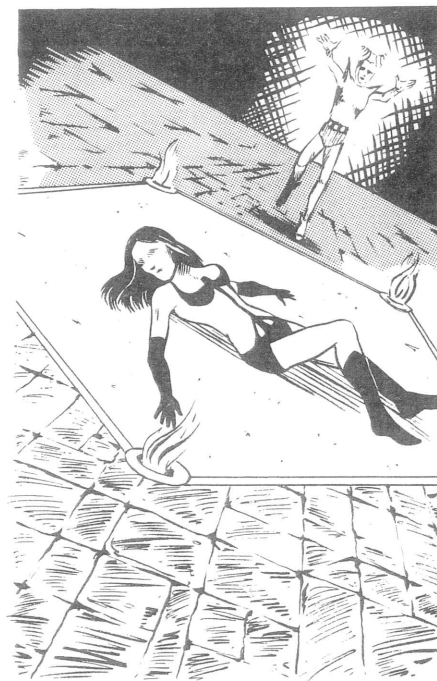
Mark cast a venomous stare at his brother and rushed to Aphrodite's side. Searching for her pulse, he cried, "I can't find any pulse beat, damn you! She's gone into another deep trance — either that or she's dead!" Suddenly Mark Owens gasped — the fall had torn open Skull Goddess' gunshot wound and it was bleeding profusely! Mark's hate-filled eyes burned into Mitch as Marilyn her dying lover. ***

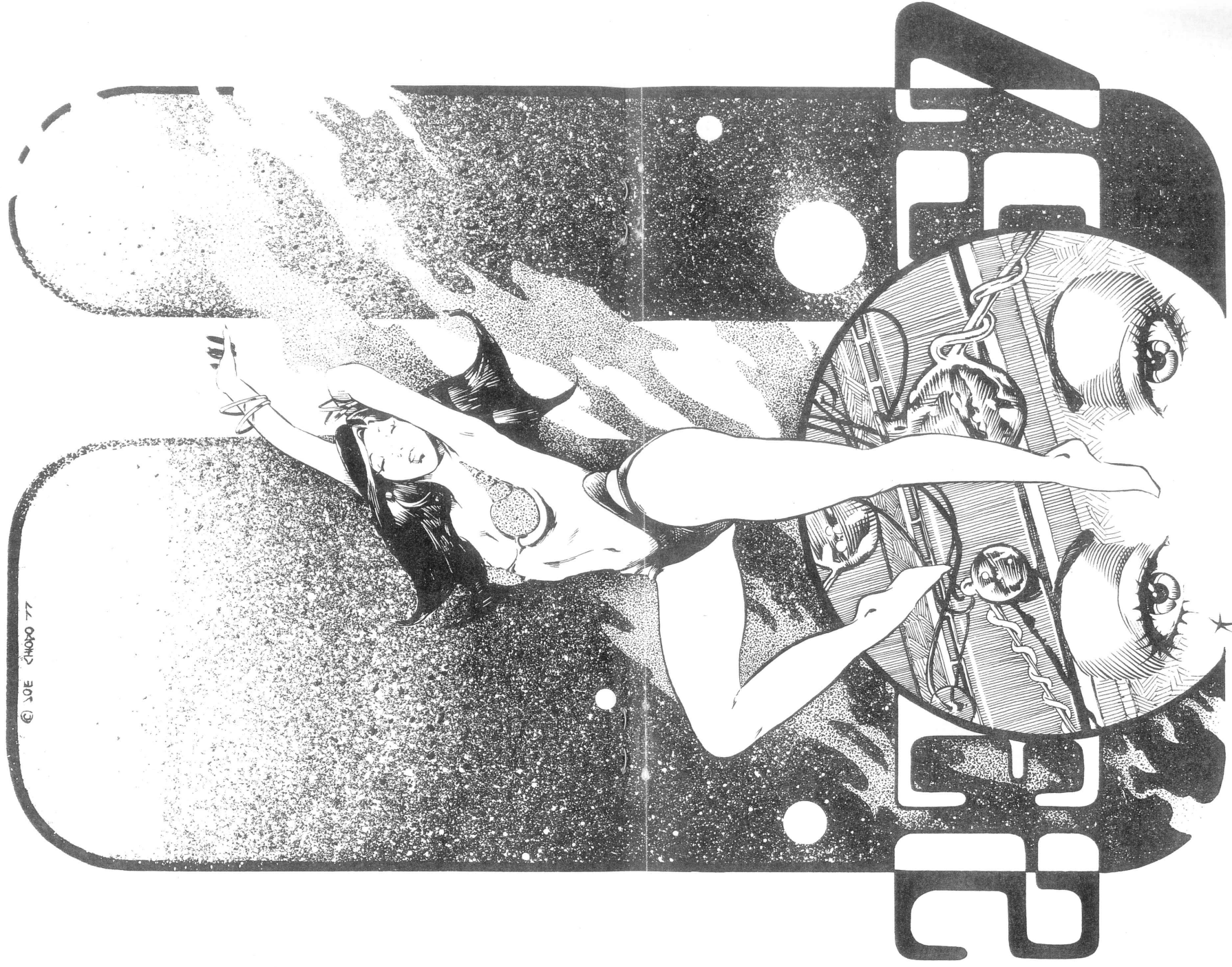
The ebon cloak lifted and Skull Goddess slowly opened her eyes. She was surrounded by dark-yet-lustrous walls which extended into deep shadows dozens of meters above her. ETHERA! Because of her hazy vision and general feeling of nausea, she knew that Hesbolo had drugged this body. Skull Goddess found herself lying in the center of what looked like a huge, mystical diagram scratched onto the floor. It had taken all of her energy to turn her head to see the symbol; how could she hope to defend herself against Hesbolo?

Suddenly Aphrodite became aware of Hesbolo's presence in a corner of the gleaming chamber, partially hidden in the dark shadows. The hideous crone's voice rasped and cracked as she intoned an arcane chant. *Oh, Lord, Skull Goddess thought to herself. She's trying*

to transfer my unstable molecular condition to herself! But surely it won't work . . . ? Surely not this way . . . ?

At that instant, Hesbolo emitted a shrill shriek and she was consumed in a brilliant light. The nova continued to flare for a long moment, during which Skull Goddess struggled to a kneeling position. *Has it worked for her? Has it really worked?*

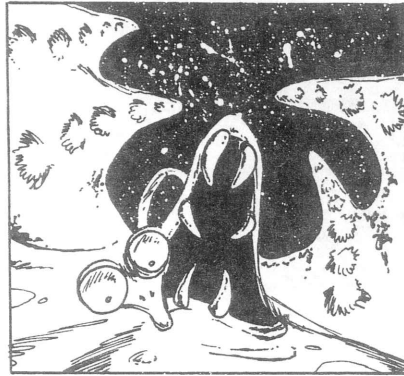




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The light subsided and Skull Goddess strained to focus her eyes upon the once-again shadowed corner. Aphrodite's sunken eyes widened in sheer terror as she realized that Hesbolo's dualism spell had worked — albeit in a horrifyingly unexpected way. Now two creatures stood before her! One resembled Hesbolo, but with a perfectly innocent, pristine countenance and mien. Skull Goddess realized that Hesbolo's essence had been divided into the witch's pure, good side and her wicked side — for before her crouched a mammoth, toothsome, snarling behemoth whose black eyes darted hellfire! The heroine struggled to rid herself of the potion's sedating effect as the slaving, incarnate evil of Hesbolo immediately and completely devoured the being of purity and began a shuffling advance toward Skull Goddess! ***

As soon as I saw her hideous face on that news report, I knew that she was the one I needed," Bruno Adrian muttered to himself as he stooped over a series of full test tubes and laboratory equipment in a small, crude lab somewhere in Aphrodite's Earthly hometown. The grotesque little man mentally congratulated himself on getting past those two men at the Riverside Hospital and extracting quite a lot of tissue samples from the still form of Skull Goddess!



Bruno Adrian crossed the dimly-lit laboratory to a large microscope and peered into it. Grinning, he said aloud, "No, no; this time won't be like the other times. This one will not be imperfect or immature like the other specimens. This time, it means too much to me. I shall be 100% successful — not to mention swift — in my procedure. At last, after all these hellish years, I shall have a devoted companion — and lover! — who will not shun me or ridicule me for the way I look! She will be like me — she too is ugly! And she will be completely subservient to me! She'll never humiliate me; she'll never leave me." Bruno Adrian gestured lovingly to the viscous contents of the test tubes and exclaimed, "Just wait, my darling — not very much longer! Very soon now, you will be born! I shall give life to you — a perfect CLONE of the grotesque Skull Goddess!"

In a bloodied, top-floor room of the sleek Hamilton Memorial Hospital, a whimpering Marilyn Leonard slowly followed the pair of orderlies upon whose moving cot lay the dying form of young Dr. Jerry Marlowe. Mark and Mitch Owens stared concernedly after the grim procession as it exited from Skull Goddess' hospital room, and then Mark returned his worried gaze to the lifeless heroine whose head he gently held in his lap. The young attorney whispered



loving words to Skull Goddess as Mitch stared painfully at his older sibling, whom he always had adored. Finally the volatile accountant declared, "Mark, I — I'm sorry. I didn't mean to make her hit her head or tear her wound open or anything like that. I just don't want to see you victimized by this . . . freak."

Mark Owens sternly addressed his brother, with, "You are hardly one to talk about victimizing people right now." After that condemnation of Mitch, Mark returned his full attention to his unmoving fiancée.

Mitch persisted, saying, "Dammit, Mark, forget about her! What kind of

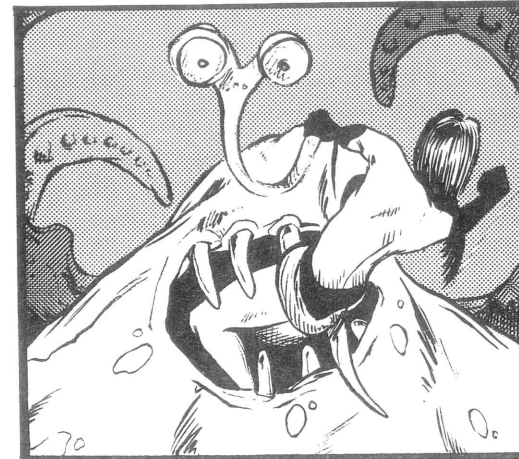
life do you think you'd be able to have with a broad who runs around half-naked doing wild things like swinging off of buildings — and then with a face like that? And her spells like this one — where she acts like she's dead! I swear, she's got brain damage and she's crazy!"

"She's a brave woman — a heroine! Haven't you heard of Raven up north? Skull Goddess is just trying to do what's right — even though people like you give her every reason not to bother! Oh, hell, I don't know whether she's in a trance or a coma, but we've got to stop arguing and think about Skull Goddess! Mitch, run and find a doctor somewhere and bring her in here! If this awful bleeding doesn't stop — Skull Goddess will die! Hurry! ***



In Ethera, a drugged, sluggish Skull Goddess had watched in horror as the monster of evil had destroyed its pure counterpart and roared in triumph! The behemoth shuffled toward the heroine now and she managed to stand up and lean on a wall. *I've got to snap out of this stupor!* she thought to herself. *How can I possibly get away from that thing if I can't put one foot in front of the other?*

As the monster approached her, Skull Goddess frantically studied the walls for a door. She gasped as no portal could be found by her searching eyes and as the being of malevolence loomed mere meters before her, thus making her plans for escape academic. Now that she was cornered, Skull Goddess had to battle the hate-thing and win — lest her Ethera body join the shredded, pulped remains of the pure Hesbolo's in the bloated belly of the unspeakable leviathan before her!



Now swiftly sobering, Skull Goddess screamed as a leathery, blood-stained claw found a grip deep within her bare flesh and pulled her flailing form toward its pulsating body. Aphrodite wailed in agony and struck wildly at the monster's head and torso. The other claw advanced toward her head, completely covering her face. Staring into darkness, and feeling as if her body would explode in a feverish geyser of blood, Aphrodite — Skull Goddess of two worlds — saw a vision of Mark Owens — and then it was over.

Skull Goddess was dead before the monster's flesh-encrusted fangs skewered

her mutilated body. ***

The heroine's consciousness was wrenched from the torn corpse and if wafted through the limbo between realms. Suddenly consciousness returned to the Earthbound body of Skull Goddess and she opened her eyes. An astonished Mark Owens stared wide-eyed at her and then stroked her hair. "Oh, my darling," he exclaimed, "you've snapped out of it! You're going to be all right now!"

The extremely weak, bleeding Aphrodite gazed into Mark's earnest eyes and choked, "No, Mark . . . my body . . . other body . . . in Ethera . . . just d-died . . . I can't ever go b-back th-ere."

Mark looked quizzically at her for a moment and then observed, "No, honey, you're just

delirious. Mixed up! Don't think about dying. You aren't going to --"

"No, Mark . . . listen to m-me . . . I was killed in my other body . . . violently. It was a terrific . . . shock to . . . my spirit . . . I thought I could . . . come back to . . . th-this body, but it's too weak to sustain itself either. I know I'm bleeding. I've lost . . . too much bl-blood to l-live. I've died in both . . . worlds. Goodbye, my darling."

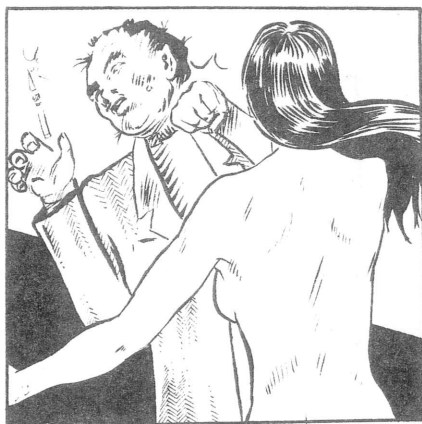
The tears which were streaming down Mark Owens' rugged face glistened in the light. "Don't say good-bye, Aphrodite - Dot! You don't know what you're talking about! Listen, Mitch is bringing a doctor and he'll stop the bleeding - just hang on!" Mark regarded the thick, crimson stain which had spread over almost all of both of them - and he wept.

Skull Goddess whispered, "I've died both places today . . . both places, Mark . . . I love you, dearest. I love you with all my h-heart . . . because you were com-compassionate when everyone else . . . spat on me. I'll always . . . love . . . you . . ." Skull Goddess' sunken eyes glazed and Mark sobbed uncontrollably until he was aware of Mitch shaking him and crying, "Mark, I've brought the doctor! He's here now!"



"Here you are, my love!" Bruno Adrian announced to a closed, long box as he re-entered his laboratory carrying a woman's blouse and short pants. Laying the clothes down near the slender container, he clutched its lid expectantly and threw it open! Inside the box was the unmoving, completed, nude clone - and Adrian

cried out in terror and anguish! The female clone's visage was one of incomparable beauty! Bruno Adrian covered his ghastly face and cursed the lovely appearance of the Skull Goddess clone! "No!" he yelled over and over. "Why? Why is she pretty and not ugly? How could that happen? Why did it happen to me - when I needed the hideous woman I saw on television? And-and why isn't she moving? It's impossible for her to be formed dead; the original Skull Goddess was not dead when I extracted those tissues, was she?" After another moment's lamentation, the ugly man's face twisted in fury. Retreating to a nearby table, he declared, "You haven't won, pretty woman! You won't hurt me too! I won't let you! I'll take away your beauty right now!" The demented gnome advanced toward the lifeless clone, a finely-sharpened scalpel clutched tightly in his sweaty hand.



Bruno Adrian bent over the beauty in the box and raised the lethal instrument over his head, readying it to bring to down in a disfiguring swoop. Suddenly the clone rocketed out of its angular womb and hurled Adrian to the floor! After a moment, the little man stared up at the unclothed vision of loveliness towering majestically over him. Adrian was both captivated and enraged by her peerless, goddess-like beauty. Anger contorting his gruesome countenance, Bruno Adrian snarled not unlike an animal and lunged upward off the floor at the gorgeous clone's slender throat. "Die, damnable clone!" he spat.

As Adrian's stubby fingers began throttling his too-perfect creation, the Skull Goddess clone fell backwards against the creation-box - and she used her feet to catapult her assailant across the small room and away from her. The deranged biologist crumpled to the floor. The lovely clone eyed him thoughtfully.

The cloned Aphrodite surveyed her surroundings and finding the clothes, quickly donned them. Then, she began to speak aloud. "I am Aphrodite!" she exclaimed. "I'm still alive - I'm not dead! Yet both of my bodies died today! How - ?" Her lovely hands felt the outline of her face and Bruno Adrian's words echoed in her mind - "Die, damnable clone!" "Clone." CLONE!

At last she understood and she rejoiced in her new lease on life and in her regained beauty which the asylum's electrodes had robbed. She was Skull Goddess no more - once again, she was worthy of her divine name, Aphrodite! *My cells and stuff must have been taken out of me at some thime when my mind was in Ethera*, she mused. *Thank God that that crazy man made this clone - I'm beautiful again because what made my face so ugly was never part of my genes or cells - but it was induced artificially by that damn electric shock treatment at Westlawn. This clone looks the way I did before they ruined my face!*

"I don't really understand it all," she said aloud, "but I guess that, when my soul left my two dead bodies, instead of going on the afterlife, my spirit was drawn back to Earth to this new, organic part of my essence. Only why did the man who made this body try to kill me right when I came alive?" The new, gorgeous Skull Goddess dismissed the question as unimportant and burst gleefully out of Bruno Adrian's cottage and into the invigorating spring sunlight. Aphrodite's eyes widened suddenly as a thought occurred to her. "Mark!" she squealed. "Mark, I'm not dead anymore! We can be together again! This new and pretty body has mad that possible! Oh, my darling, don't despair! I'm coming for you - and I'll never leave you again!" Aphrodite darted away, revelling in her new existence.

"Please, Mark, let go of her!" Mitch Owens begged his brother as a doctor looked on. Still Mark gripped the limp body of the amazing woman whom he had loved. Mark's cascading tears mingled with the teary stains on the corpse's skull-like countenance. Mitch fought back tears of his own as he stooped and attempted to pry loose Mark's hands from the deceased heroine.

Suddenly the door of the hospital room was flung open by a radiant, ebony-tressed beauty clad only in a blouse and short shorts. "Mark!" the cloned Aphrodite cried. "It's me! Aphrodite! Your 'Skull Goddess!'" The Owensens and Dr. Gabriel Waller looked stupefied and Mark stood up finally. The Aphrodite's gaze fell upon the body at Mark Owens' feet. She studied the corpse's horrid face and she screamed and turned her back for a moment.

Mark slowly inquired, "Who . . . are . . . you?"

Aphrodite whirled around to face him and declared, "Darling, I'm 'Skull Goddess!' My consciousness returned to Earth by taking over this cloned body!"

Dr. Gabriel Waller stammered, "C-Clone? Lady, are you saying y-you're a- clone?"

Aphrodite replied, "Yes! I don't know how it happened, Mark darling, but as a clone of my original body I'm not disfigured anymore! Mark, don't you recognize my voice? My build and figure? Why are you staring at me like that?" The lovely clone's eyes fell to her former, ghastly frame on the floor and she shuddered. "Oh, Mark, hold me," she implored him. "I want to forget everything about how I looked and what I did and how I existed in two worlds! All that's important now is that we're together again! Darling, hold me --"

Mark Owens regarded the woman before him with a mixture of fright and anger. He stared into the clone's eyes and declared, "I don't know who you are, or how you knew I was here and that my fiancée had just died, but I can't believe what you're saying."

"That's right," Mitch chimed in. "We don't believe you, so why don't you just - ?"

"Good Lord, Mark, no!" Aphrodite protested. "You've got to believe me! I am everything that Skull Goddess was - and more! This is my exact same mind and soul, but a different body! And a much prettier body than . . . that. Mark, what's wrong? Instead of doubting me, you should

be thankful that some man cloned my body before I died!"

After an electric silence, Dr. Gabriel Waller remarked, "Mr. Owens, there is such a thing as cloning. This is the first human clone I've seen, but —"

"Don't kid yourself, man!" Mitch interrupted him. "This broad isn't a real clone! That's just science fiction! She's just trying to play up to us for money! For money!"

"Is that all you think women ever do, Mitch?" rebuked Mark. Turning to the comely clone, "I'll admit that you act like Skull Goddess, and maybe you're whom you say you are . . ."

"No, Mark!" Mitch exclaimed.

" . . . But, even if you are Skull Goddess returned somehow as a clone, you're an artificial human being. You're not real. You weren't born from a woman; if what I've read about cloning is true and you are one, then you were just cooked up in some beaker in a lab — an organic robot."

"Robot? No, Mark! I —"

"I loved Skull Goddess! The real Skull Goddess! I could never have a relationship with something that isn't human! It's unnatural! It would be like —"

Aphrodite trembled and forced out a plaintive wail which chilled all three men. "Not you too!" the clone screamed. "Not you too! After treating me so kind all those months when I was a freak, you're going to turn against me now! Just like everyone else! Just like everyone else! Damn you, I won't let you hurt me! You won't turn against me now!" With an incredible force, Aphrodite's bare fist crunched against Mark Owen's jaw. The young lawyer pitched backwards and there was a terrifying loud crack! as the back of his skull met the uncarpeted floor of the hospital room. A crimson halo appeared around Mark's head within seconds.

Gabriel Waller rushed to the stricken man and bent over him. After a long moment, the physician turned and fixed his eyes upon Aphrodite. "He's dead! You killed him!"

Aphrodite's spine lurched in shock and Mitch moaned. "Lousy murderer!" Mark's brother screamed and lunged at the beautiful clone. Mitch struggled with his sibling's killer, cursing and threatening her. Finally the agile Aphrodite broke away from Mitch's grip and dashed out of the room and down the corridor. She could hear Mitch Owens yelling and pursuing her from behind.

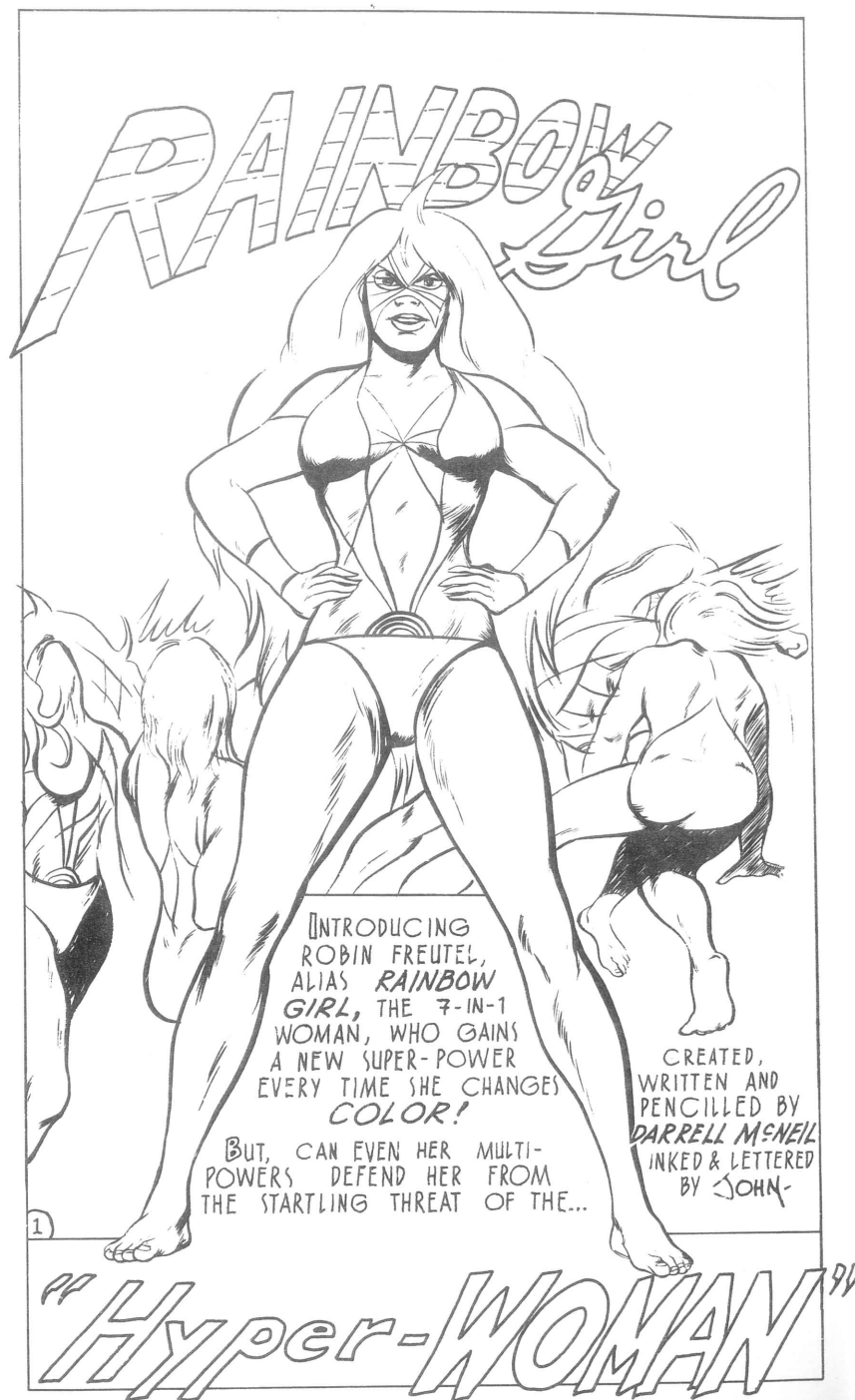
At the end of the corridor was a door. Glimpsing Mitch swiftly approaching her from behind, she hurriedly entered the doorway and leapt up the stairway which lay beyond it. Aphrodite emerged on the open rooftop of the Riverside Hamilton Memorial Hospital, cursing her bad luck. Moments later, Mitch burst onto the roof and smiled malevolently at her. "You won't get away from me now, lady!" Mitch hissed as he advanced, his outstretched hands almost claw-like. "There's no way for you to go but down — all the way down to the river!"

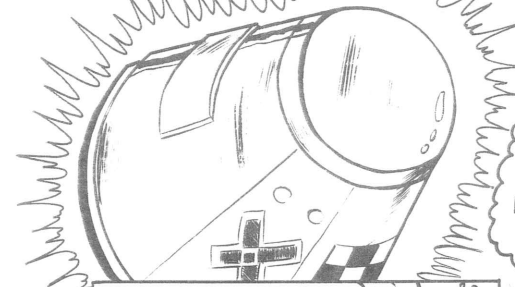
Aphrodite gasped — the Ferris River! It was her only escape! She glanced behind her at the large, deep river over which the hospital extended. Her mind's eye saw her performing that dazzling swing off of that exterior bubble elevator downtown: she knew that she could make the jump . . .

At that moment she hopped up onto the narrow ledge running along the entire roof. She regarded the churning river eleven stories below her and steeled herself for her astounding leap. Suddenly she was aware of Mitch Owens running toward her with his arms outstretched, ready to shove her off! Aphrodite faced him and kicked him mightily in the face. Mitch stumbled backwards — and so did



(continued on page 35)





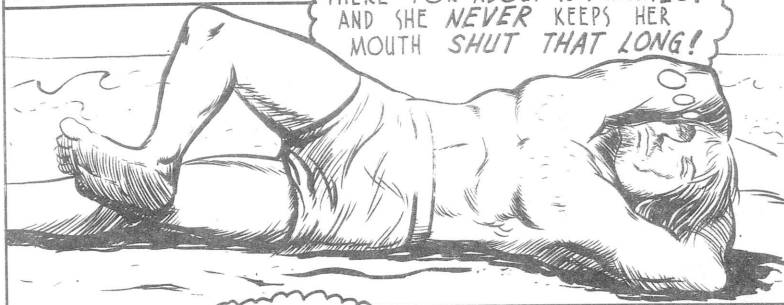


PARTICULARLY
WHEN IT CAME
TO KISSING!
UMPH!...

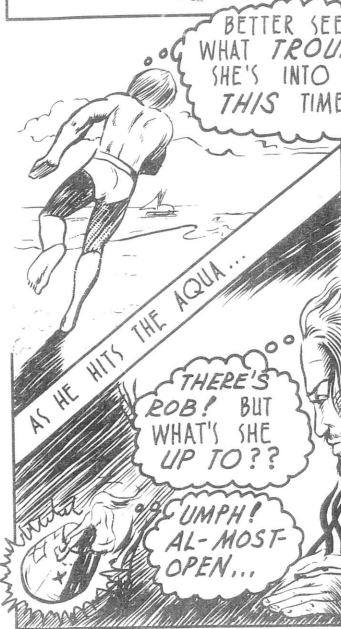


UMM! MAYBE
I'D BETTER
GET STEVIE TO
HELP ME! UMPH!

MEANWHILE, TOPSIDES...



ROBIN'S BEEN DOWN
THERE FOR ABOUT 2 MINUTES!
AND SHE NEVER KEEPS HER
MOUTH SHUT THAT LONG!



BETTER SEE
WHAT TROUBLE
SHE'S INTO
THIS TIME!

AS HE HITS THE AQUA...

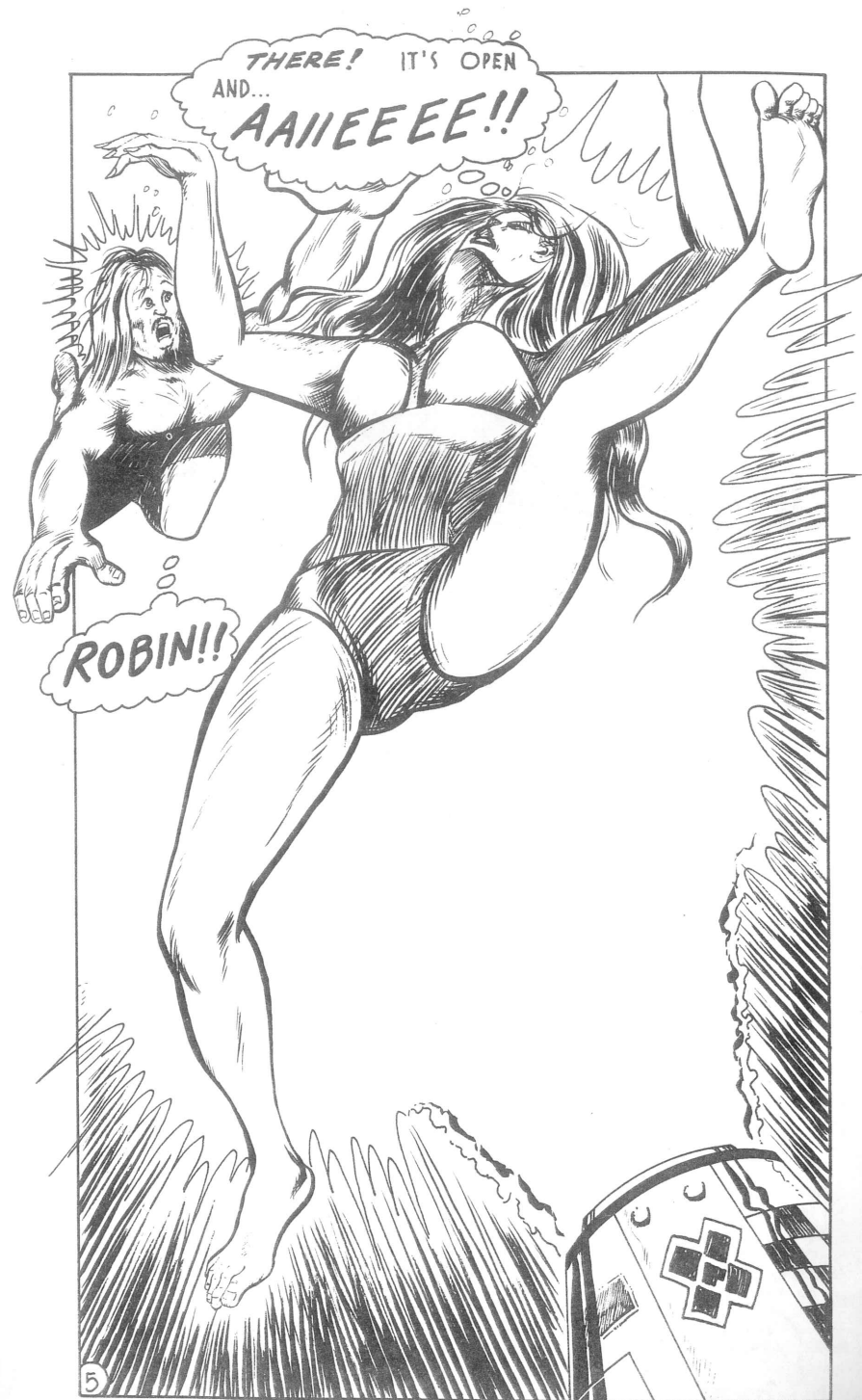
THERE'S
ROB! BUT
WHAT'S SHE
UP TO??

UMPH!
AL-MOST-
OPEN...



HMM! IT'S A
SATELLITE,
BUT IT DOESN'T
HAVE AMERICAN
OR RUSSIAN
MARKINGS AND...
ROBIN! DON'T
OPEN THAT?!

HERE
COMES STEVIE!
HE MUST'VE
READ MY
MIND!



THERE! IT'S OPEN
AND...
AAIEEEEE!!

ROBIN!!



GRIPPING THE LIMP GIRL IN HIS ARMS...

GOT TO GET ROB TO THE SURFACE-- FAST!!



AFTER MOUTH-TO-MOUTH RESUSCITATION ON THE SURFACE...

...UHH... CHEESE AND CRACKERS... WHERE AM I?



WOULD'JA BELIEVE... PISMO BEACH?



YOU'RE LUCKY I DECIDED TO FOLLOW YOU DOWN THERE! YOU GOT SHOOK UP PRETTY BADLY! YOU OKAY?

...ALL OF YOU!



YEA, I CAN STAND, BUT I FEEL SORTA TINGLY--!

...YOUR LEGS...



ROB... LOOK !!

YOUR FEET...



HOLY MOLEY!! I'M AS RED AS A LOBSTER!!

LET ME OUTTA HERE! I DON'T KNOW WHAT THIS IS, BUT MAYBE WATER'LL WASH IT OFF!

ROBIN! WAIT A MIN...



THEN...

HOLY SPIT!!

ROBIN! COME BACK HERE!!

DON'T TELL ME! ...TELL MY FEET!

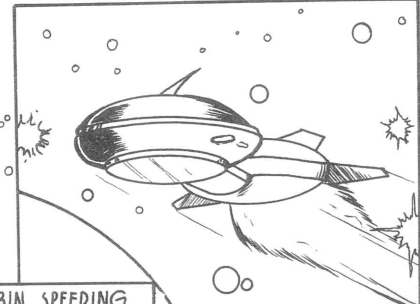
I CAN'T STOP ME!!

AND ROBIN HURTTLES OFF... 'TILL SHE SPEEDS OVER THE HORIZON AND OUT OF SIGHT...

SECONDS LATER, HALFWAY AROUND THE WORLD, ROB MAKES AN ALARMING DISCOVERY...



HELP! MY BIKINI'S BURNED OFF!!!



WHY IS ROBIN SPEEDING AROUND THE WORLD? CAN SHE STOP HERSELF? WILL SHE BE KNOWN AS THE WORLD'S FASTEST STREAKER? ...WHO INHABITS THIS SPACE SHIP?

AND WHERE IS THE HYPER WOMAN MENTIONED IN THE STORY TITLE? -WHEN WILL I STOP ASKING INSIPID QUESTIONS??

7 FIND OUT NEXT ISSUE!

IXIONA:

Centauress in the 20th Century

by Nick Chinn

Introduction

Centaur, beings that were half-man and half-horse, reportedly disappeared during ancient Greek times. These so-called mythological creatures were stamped out because of their ignominious reputation of being drunken, wild, lawless and inhospitable. Because they were half animal, they were thought to be driven by a predominant animal passion. When a drunken centaur attempted to kidnap Hippodamia, bride of King Pirithous, a spectacular battle between the Lapithae people and the centaurs ensued. Consequently the centaurs were driven away from the country. With all that bad publicity, it's no wonder that the few remaining centaurs today lead hermit-like existences.

Chapter One: The P.R. Lady

Diana Morris is a busy up-and-coming account executive at the San Jose office of the prestigious William Morris agency — one of the biggest and best talent and public relations companies in the world. She's interviewing one of many hopeful actresses, when her telephone rings.

"William Morris Agency . . . may I help you?" she recited.

"Long distance from Greece . . . one moment please," said a nasal operator's voice.

"Hello?" squeaked a female voice. "Who am I talking to?"

"My name's Diana Morris. And no, I'm not related to the owner."

"You were recommended to me by a friend," said the caller.

"May I have your name, please?" asked Diana.

"My name's Ixiona."

"Now that's a unique one," smiled Diana. "Are you a singer or actress or something?" Performers often conjure up catchy manes to accelerate the process of becoming a big star — famous names like Vincent Furnier, Reginald Kenneth Dwight, Robert Zimmerman and Roberta Joan Anderson.

"I'm neither," said Ixiona. "I'm calling because I need public relations help. I was told that you were good and could help me."

Diana sensed an urgency in the caller's voice. "Okay . . . would you like to set up an appointment to see us? It's kind of far from Greece — you know we do have offices closer to you."

"No, I prefer to work with you alone . . . there are reasons we can discuss later," said Ixiona. "And I'd like for you to come visit me at my home. I can't really come to see you there."

The prospective starlet Diana had been talking to shifted impatiently in her seat, and stared at the fluorescent lights on the ceiling. The starlet sighed and Diana sighed.

"I don't really have the time to fly all the way to Greece," Diana said. "I still have clients here to take care of."

"Don't worry. I can afford to compensate for your time. You have some interest in this case, too. Are we agreed?"

"Agreed on what?" Diana was totally confused.

"That you'll meet me here."

"Where? In what city in Greece?"

"I'll send private transportation to bring you here."

Now that sounded impressive. Diana agreed.

Chapter Two: Flight to Greece

Diana returned to her one-bedroom apartment that afternoon, still in amazement over the strange telephone call. She sat on the edge of her waterbed and kicked her shoes off. A loud knock came on the door, and she went to open it.

Standing there was a tall, handsome man with white hair. He was clad in a small, white toga, gold belt and sandals. "I am Alberon," he said. "You are Miss Morris?"

Diana was a bit surprised by his appearance and directness. "Yes, that's my name."

"I was summoned by Ixiona to bring you to Greece. Are you ready to leave?"

"Already? I didn't expect anyone so soon." Diana went to put her shoes back on. "It will take a while to pack. What do I need to take with me?"

"We won't have much room . . . whatever you can put in a small sack — a change of clothes or so," said Alberon.

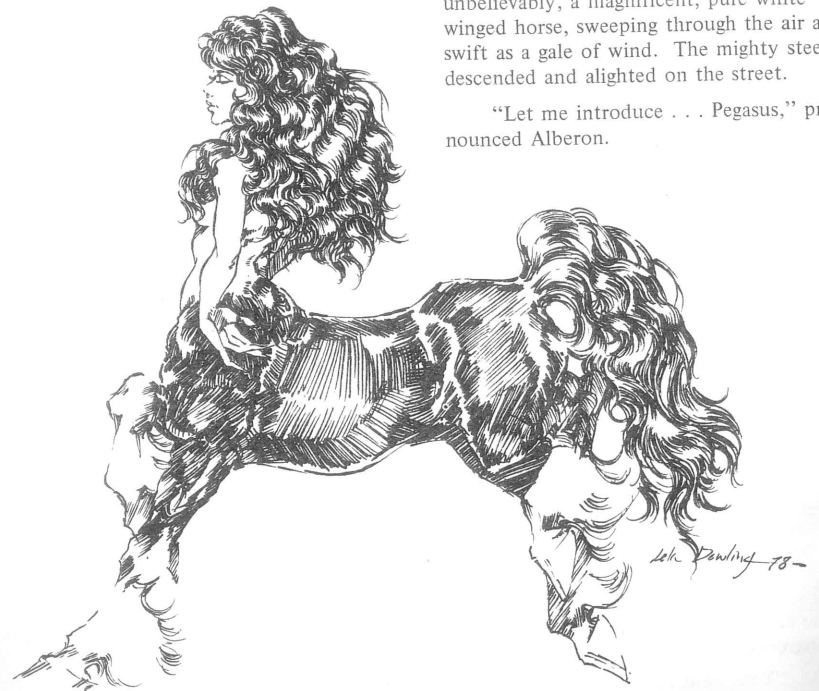
Diana thought it must be some small airplane they would be taking, but she obliged. She was ready in a few minutes. "This is quite short notice, but I'm ready to go." They walked out of the apartment to the sidewalk, and Diana looked up and down the street for a fancy car or something. Maybe Ixiona was a rich daughter of a shipping tycoon or the like. "Where's the car?" she asked.

"Did not Ixiona tell you she would fly you to Greece?"

"Yes, but how do we get to the airport?"

"We fly directly to Greece," said Alberon. He pointed up to the sky, and Diana saw, unbelievably, a magnificent, pure white winged horse, sweeping through the air as swift as a gale of wind. The mighty steed descended and alighted on the street.

"Let me introduce . . . Pegasus," pronounced Alberon.



Diana gaped, speechless. This can't really be happening, she thought.

"Please hop aboard. We will arrive in Greece before you know it," said Alberon. "Just close your eyes. I'll put you asleep with this star dust — it will make the trip pass quickly."

Chapter Three: In the Caves of the Hills of Thessaly

Diana awoke just in time to find Pegasus winging to a smooth landing at the mouth of a cave remote from any village. Alberon motioned Diana inside the cave and Pegasus followed at a distance. They were acknowledged by a well-armed guard. A dim, narrow passageway led down to a larger cavern, well-lighted by torches. The cavern was warm and spacious, furnished with comfortable home-made chairs. There were several very large couches, big enough for a horse, perhaps to accommodate Pegasus. Passageways to separate caverns surrounded the main room.

"Ixiona . . . I've returned with our guest," announced Alberon, his voice echoing slightly against the stone walls.

Diana heard the sound of clopping hooves coming from one of the passageways and looked, expecting to see Pegasus. Instead, she saw the form of . . . a centauress!

The centauress had a powerful horse's body with a rich coat of reddish-brown hair and a long, bushy and wavy tail. The hair from her knees downward was pearly white, long and shaggy. Her human upper body was slim but strong, and her face was as appealing as any actress's features Diana ever saw. A head of long, flowing reddish-brown hair covered the centauress's bare chest. "I am Ixiona," said the centauress. "You can see now why it was difficult for me to visit you, and had to bring you here."

Diana pinched herself. Yes, she was really awake, and this was really happening. The centauress offered her some wine, and Diana drank from an earthen vessel. It tasted exquisite, like none from the best of France. "Now, do you mind if I ask why I have been brought here?" asked Diana.

"As I mentioned on the telephone," said Ixiona, "I have a public relations problem. The centaur race has a deep-rooted reputation of being drunken, lawless, and untrustworthy. With your expert help, we can reverse that image. We want to be understood as the benevolent creatures we really are. My father, Chiron, was a . . ."

"Your father was Chiron, son of Cronus?" Diana began to equate these events with her knowledge of mythology. "I have read that Chiron was the most wise and just of all the centaurs."

"I am the last daughter of Chiron, who as you may know, had over fifty wives during his immortality," said Ixiona. "I myself am immortal — Zeus promised my father that his last son and daughter would be immortal. It was the last promise Zeus made to my father before he was accidentally wounded in the knee by Hercules."

Diana knew about that — Hercules accidentally shot Chiron with a poison arrow in a fracas initiated by crazed centaurs. In mortal pain, Chiron gave up his immortality to Prometheus, and Zeus placed Chiron's image in the heavens. "Isn't the constellation Centaurus your father's image in the stars?" Diana asked Ixiona.

"No, my father is the constellation Sagittarius . . . my brother is Centaurus."

"But your brother was immortal . . ."

"He was killed by the same arrow that killed my father. The same arrow also killed Pholus," said Ixiona. "A family of descendants of the Lapithae have kept the arrow all these centuries as a symbol of law over disorder. Their family hunts centaurs."

Diana felt no need for interfering in what seemed to be a family feud. "What you need is police protection, not a publicist," said Diana.

"No. We also need to let people know that there is yet another endangered species on Earth, but who will believe that centaurs really exist? That's why I hired you — you're one of the best."

Diana was flattered, but felt there was a more compelling reason for her selection. "On the phone," she said, "it sounded as though you had a more urgent reason for choosing me. Do I have some qualification I don't know about?"

"Yes," said Ixiona, "but will you believe me?"

"At this point," said Diana, "I'm ready to believe anything."

"My father was a master of hunting, medicine and music," Ixiona began. "Two of his teachers were Apollo and Artemis. You, Diana Morris, are a descendant of the goddess Artemis."

Diana stood silent for a few moments. The descendant of a goddess! "Well, Ixiona," said Diana "it makes me feel kind of proud. You must be proud, too, being the daughter of the famous Chiron." Chiron.

"Yes," said Ixiona, "but there's one thing I must do for my father. His image may be in the stars forever, but when he died, he was sent to the underworld without explanation. I want to vindicate my father and send his soul to Elysia, where it belongs."

"How is this to be done?" asked Diana. "Won't it be tough?"

"We are going to talk to some of the persons who knew my father best and get their testimonials," said Ixiona. "Then we present the evidence to Hades."

"Why do you say 'we'?" asked Diana.

"As the descendant of a goddess, you have latent powers," said Ixiona. "You will be able to help me at times. But we will have to bring about your hidden powers. This whole adventure isn't going to be easy."

In upcoming chapters: Using powers of ancient mysticism, Ixiona conjures up long-dead spirits to gain their favorable testimonial on the good nature of her father Chiron. She also meets person who are assumed dead but still living. She finds out why her father was banished to Hades — and who was behind it all.

SKULL GODDESS (from page 24)

Aphrodite! Her forceful assault of Mitch had stolen her precarious balance on the ledge! She stifled a scream as she began a whizzing plummet to the river below!

Commanding her wits to remain with her, Aphrodite jerked her body in mid-air into a diving position and used the exact, cloned duplicates of her former, extremely strong leg muscles to catapult herself through the air, farther toward the deep middle of the Ferris River. Instants later, Aphrodite felt her new body surge into the murky water and rocket down to the very bottom. Still fighting to hold her air inside her lungs, the heroine used her feet to launch herself from the bottom of the river back to the surface. After an eternity of ascent, Aphrodite's attractive head shot out of the water and she wildly gulped air. After resting on the surface for three seconds, the cloned Skull Goddess began to swim away from the hospital.

Aphrodite's tears mingled with the polluted water of the Ferris River as a furious, bellowing voice reached her ears. Standing on the roof of the hospital, Mitch Owens shook his fist at the swiftly-swimming beauty and shouted, "You haven't escaped me, 'Aphrodite!' I'll find you and make you pay for murdering my brother, whoever you are! Do you hear me, you damned killer? I'll find you — and when I do, you'll have hell to pay! Do you hear me? HELL TO PAY!"

A sobbing Aphrodite swam off into the distance, cursing her happy memories of the man whom she had loved — the man whom she had killed when he had not accepted her in the end. Her original bodies were dead — just as Mark Owens, the brilliant young attorney, was dead — and just as her hopes for the future and revelry in life were dead. The disfigured countenance of the deceased Skull Goddess body — almost a skull! — was an apt comment upon the events of the last day. That skull's lookalike — The Grim Reaper — had invaded man's transitory little world once again and had stolen people, as well as dreams, for himself.

Mitchell Owens had sworn that Aphrodite would have "hell to pay." Perhaps — but what greater hell is there than in dying twice, being reborn scientifically, being spurned by one's beloved, slaughtering him, and then running for one's life from a vicious world who can never hope — or want — to understand her?

What greater hell indeed?

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