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A **HEAVY METAL** Graphic Novel

# THE VENUS INTERFACE

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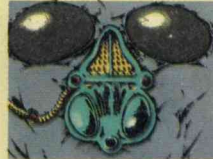


**Heavy Metal presents**

# THE VENUS INTERFACE

**by Lou Stathis**

**Jim Fletcher**



**Rick Geary**



**Peter Kuper**



**Mark Pacella**



**Kenneth Smith**



**Arthur Suydam**



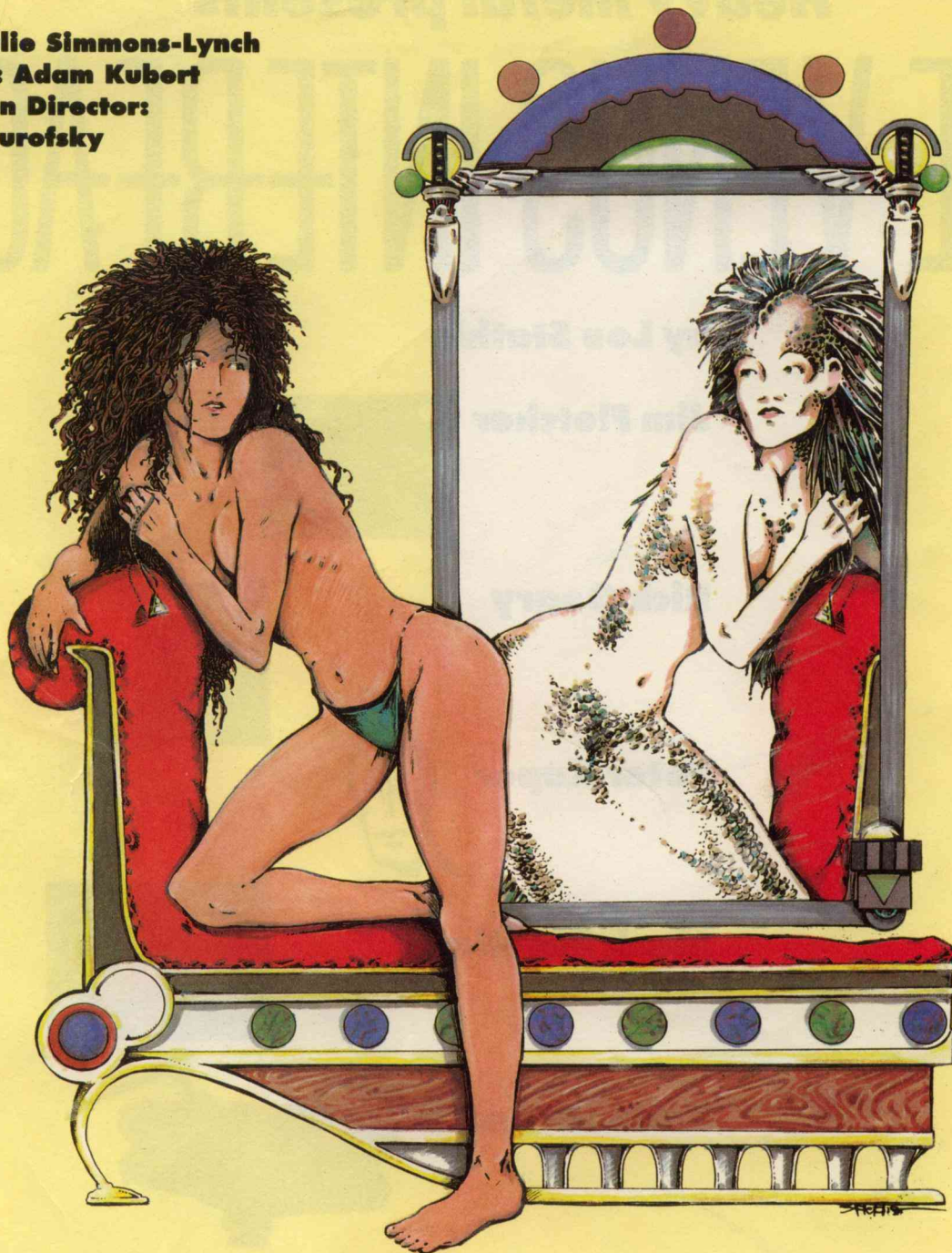
**Michael Uman**



**Cover by Olivia**



**Editor: Julie Simmons-Lynch**  
**Lettering: Adam Kubert**  
**Production Director:**  
**Howard Jurofsky**



**AUTHOR'S NOTE:** Inspirational catalysts for this graphic novel include William Burroughs (from whom I copped the word Interzone), Joy Division (who also copped the word, using it to title a song that helped set my mood during the writing), James Tiptree, Jr.'s short story "And I Awoke and Found Me Here on the Cold Hill's Side," and Philip K. Dick's novel *Eye in the Sky* (not to mention everything else he wrote, the collective cerebral marinade of which performs constant inspirational service). This work is therefore dedicated to all of them. — Lou Stathis, NYC

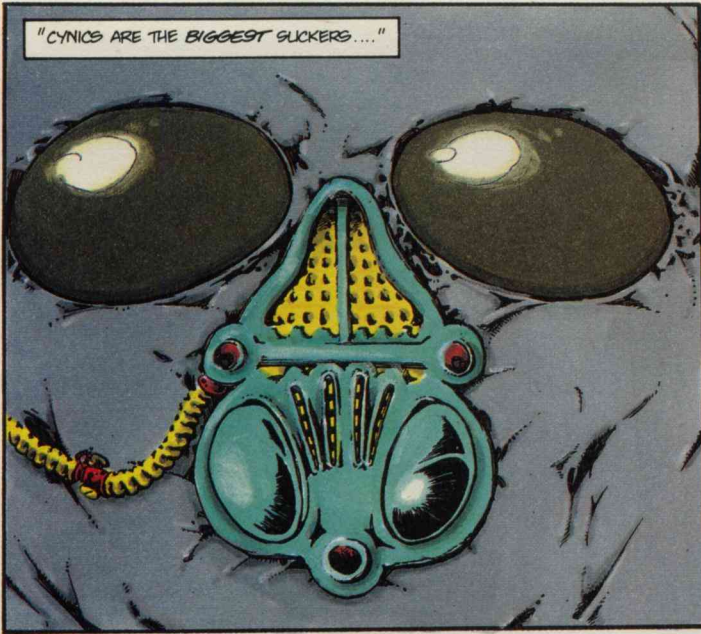
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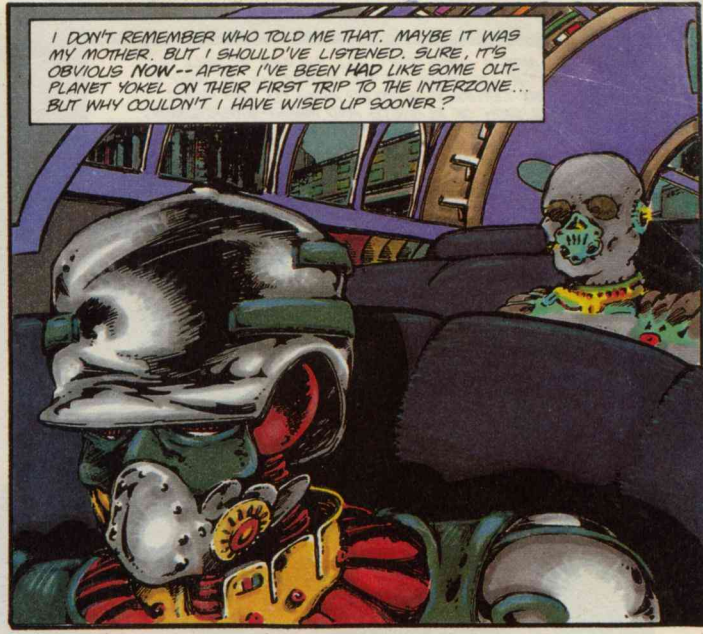
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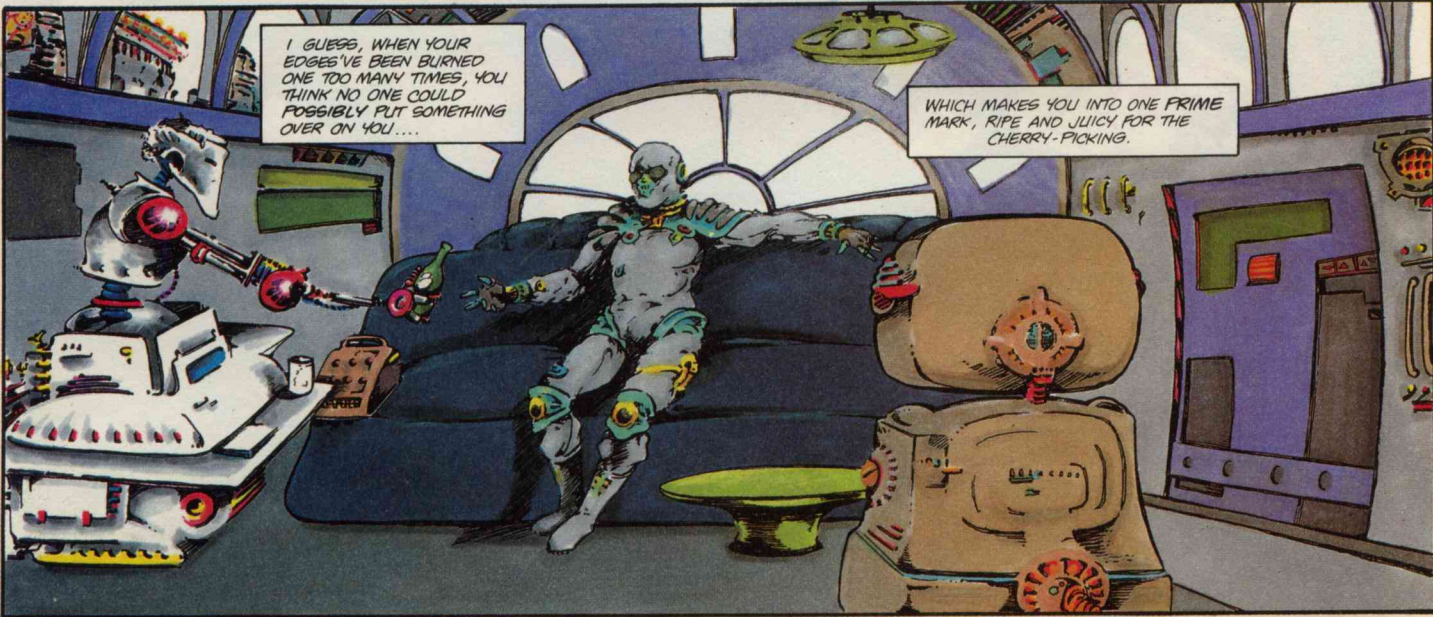
"CYNICS ARE THE BIGGEST SUCKERS...."



I DON'T REMEMBER WHO TOLD ME THAT. MAYBE IT WAS MY MOTHER. BUT I SHOULD'VE LISTENED. SURE, IT'S OBVIOUS NOW-- AFTER I'VE BEEN HAD LIKE SOME OUT-PLANET YOKEL ON THEIR FIRST TRIP TO THE INTERZONE... BUT WHY COULDN'T I HAVE WISED UP SOONER?

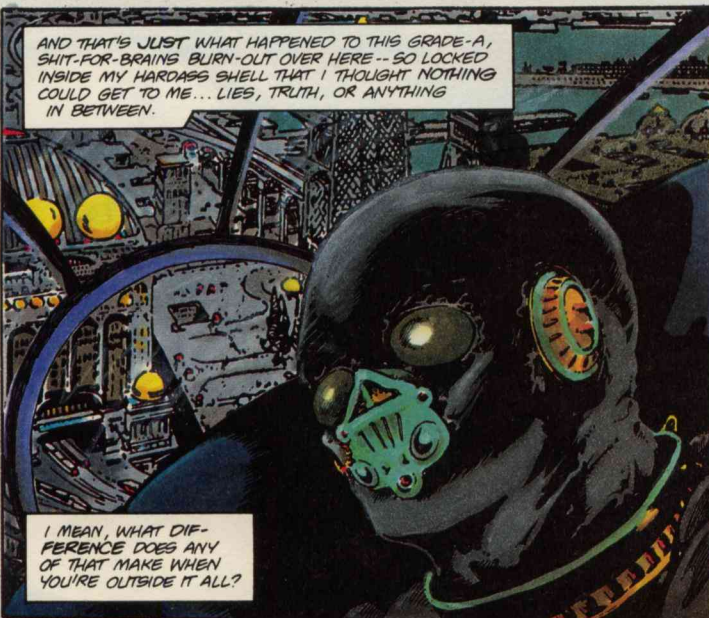


I GUESS, WHEN YOUR EDGES'VE BEEN BURNED ONE TOO MANY TIMES, YOU THINK NO ONE COULD POSSIBLY PUT SOMETHING OVER ON YOU....



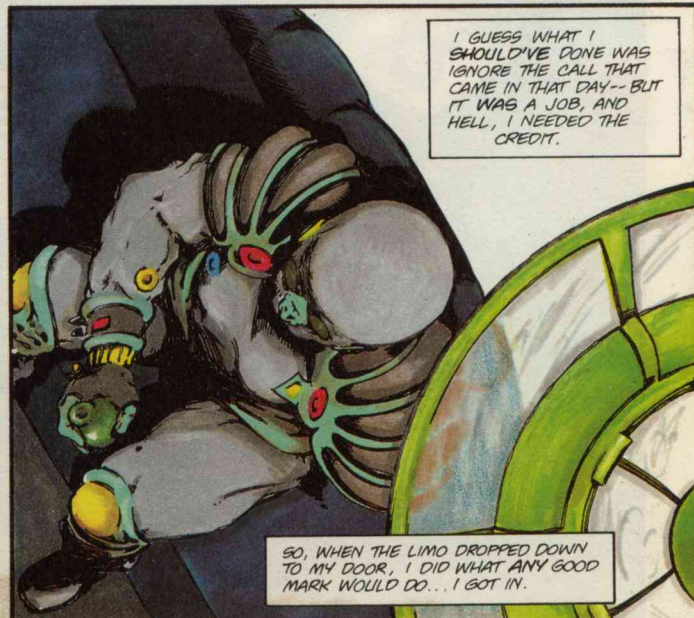
WHICH MAKES YOU INTO ONE PRIME MARK, RIPE AND JUICY FOR THE CHERRY-PICKING.

AND THAT'S JUST WHAT HAPPENED TO THIS GRADE-A, SHIT-FOR-BRAINS BURN-OUT OVER HERE--SO LOCKED INSIDE MY HARDASS SHELL THAT I THOUGHT NOTHING COULD GET TO ME... LIES, TRUTH, OR ANYTHING IN BETWEEN.



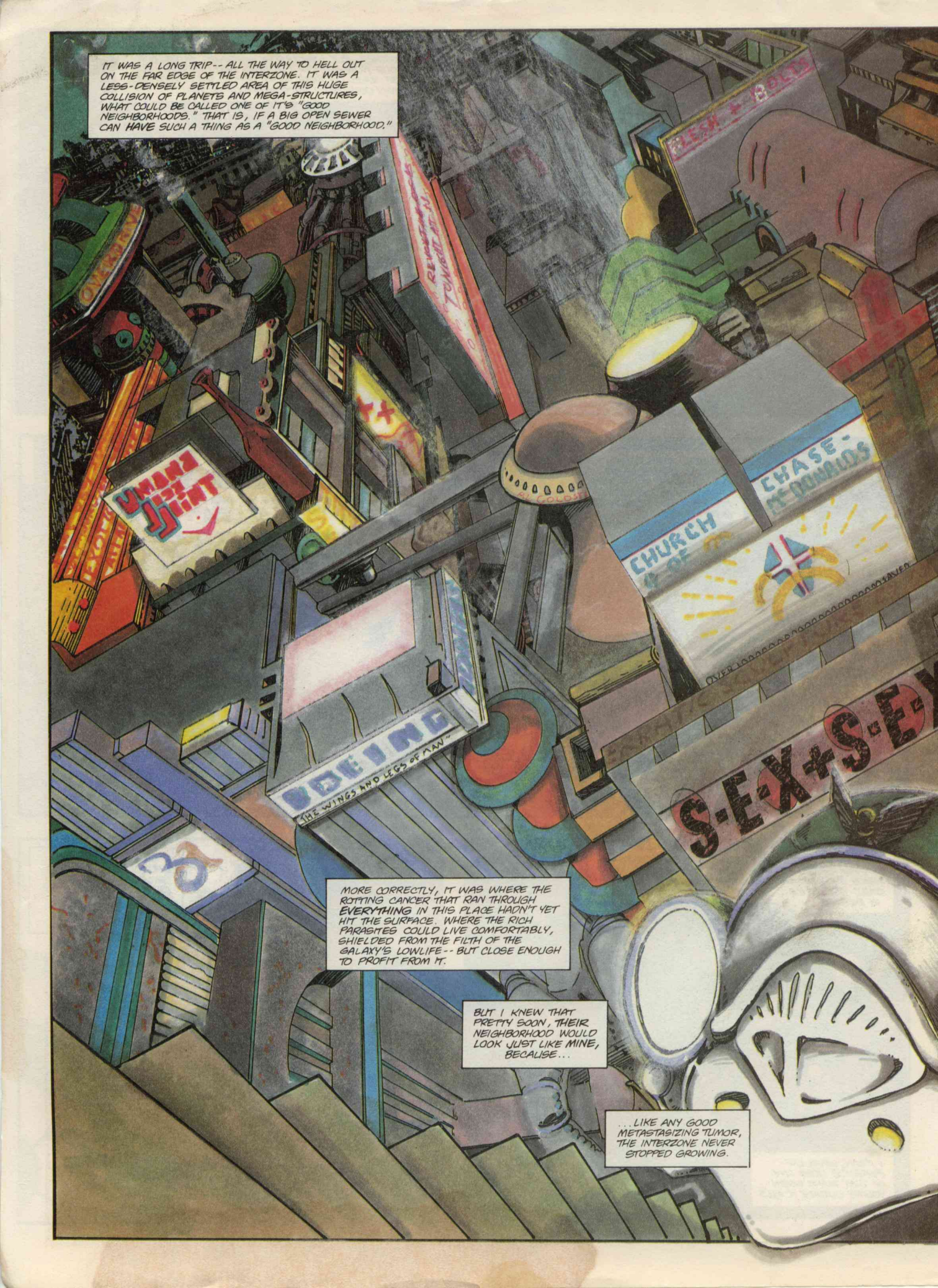
I MEAN, WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES ANY OF THAT MAKE WHEN YOU'RE OUTSIDE IT ALL?

I GUESS WHAT I SHOULD'VE DONE WAS IGNORE THE CALL THAT CAME IN THAT DAY-- BUT IT WAS A JOB, AND HELL, I NEEDED THE CREDIT.



SO, WHEN THE LIMO DROPPED DOWN TO MY DOOR, I DID WHAT ANY GOOD MARK WOULD DO... I GOT IN.





IT WAS A LONG TRIP-- ALL THE WAY TO HELL OUT ON THE FAR EDGE OF THE INTERZONE. IT WAS A LESS-DENSELY SETTLED AREA OF THIS HUGE COLLISION OF PLANETS AND MEGA-STRUCTURES, WHAT COULD BE CALLED ONE OF ITS "GOOD NEIGHBORHOODS." THAT IS, IF A BIG OPEN SEWER CAN HAVE SUCH A THING AS A "GOOD NEIGHBORHOOD."

MORE CORRECTLY, IT WAS WHERE THE ROTTING CANCER THAT RAN THROUGH EVERYTHING IN THIS PLACE HADN'T YET HIT THE SURFACE. WHERE THE RICH PARASITES COULD LIVE COMFORTABLY, SHIELDED FROM THE FILTH OF THE GALAXY'S LOWLIFE-- BUT CLOSE ENOUGH TO PROFIT FROM IT.

BUT I KNEW THAT PRETTY SOON, THEIR NEIGHBORHOOD WOULD LOOK JUST LIKE MINE, BECAUSE...

... LIKE ANY GOOD METASTASIZING TUMOR, THE INTERZONE NEVER STOPPED GROWING.





POST BROS. level 4  
MASSAGE & FUNERAL DPT

MADDER'S  
SNUFF &  
STUFF

BIG  
F.

LIVE  
Science  
Show\*

WAR DANCE C

WANDER  
MORIANE



THE INTERZONE'S BEEN SPREADING LIKE AN OMNIVOROUS MALIGNANCY FOR HUNDREDS OF GALACTIC-STANDARD-UNIT YEARS, EVER SINCE IT WAS FIRST SET UP AS A FREE-TRADE ZONE TO EASE TENSIONS BETWEEN THE MILKY WAY'S THOUSANDS OF INHABITING SPECIES.

NOTHING CURES RAMPAGING WAR-FEVER QUICKER THAN A WHIFF OF UNLIMITED PROFIT...

FREE TRADE WAS SOON FOLLOWED BY FREE EVERYTHING. THE RULE OF LAW FELL APART, BECAUSE NO ONE ELSE COULD DECIDE WHOSE LAW SHOULD RULE, AND WHO SHOULD ENFORCE IT.

THINGS GOT REAL HAIRY FOR A FEW DOZEN GSUS -- BODY COUNT IN THE MILLIONS, NO SPECIES SPARED, ETC. -- FINALLY SETTLING DOWN WITH THE ACCEPTANCE OF THE INTERZONE/HOMEWORLD EXCLUSION COMPACT, WHICH WAS THE MAXIMUM AMOUNT OF LAW ANYONE CARED TO DEAL WITH, AND THE MINIMUM REQUIRED TO KEEP ORDER.

IT ALSO ESTABLISHED RIGID HOMEWORLD SEGREGATION, WHICH MEANT THOSE AREAS WERE STRICTLY RESERVED FOR INDIGENOUS SPECIES. NO EXCEPTIONS.

...AND THE STINK OF UNHOLY MONEY HANGS HEAVY OVER THIS PLACE-- LIKE A CLOUD OF DEAD MOLECULES WAITING FOR A BLACK HOLE PLUNGE. TIME STOPS, AND EVERYTHING TEETERS ON THE EDGE OF THE ABYSS.

SEX MACHINE

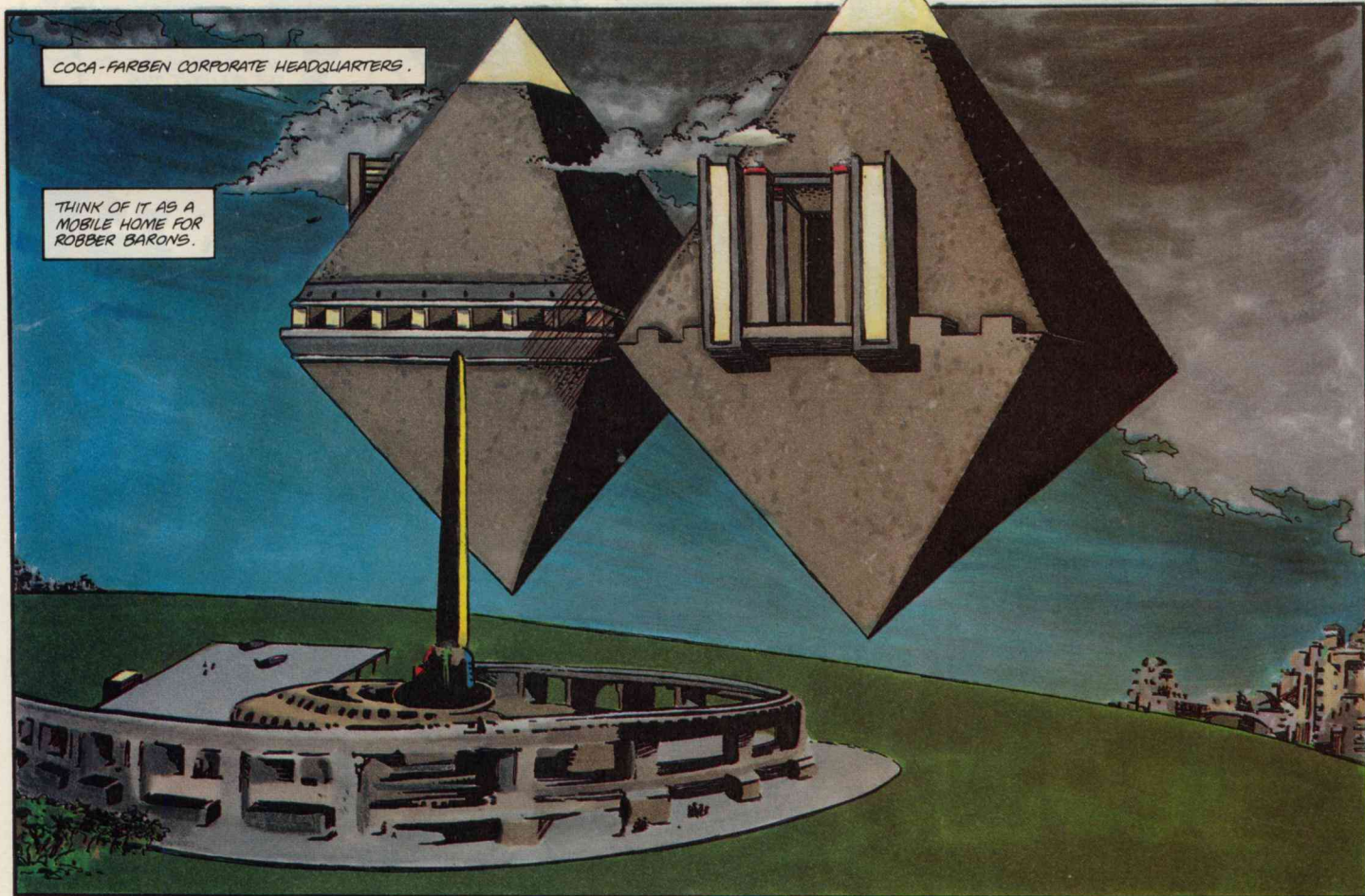
WHAT IT SAID WAS PRETTY BASIC: ANYTHING GOES IF THERE'S MUTUAL CONSENT AND FULL KNOWLEDGE OF THE CONSEQUENCES.

OTHER THAN THAT, YOU'RE ON YOUR OWN, PAL.

ESTABLISHING THE INTERZONE AS THIS POLLUTED GALACTIC CROSSROADS, WHERE THE PERPENDICULAR CHANNELS OF GREED AND PLEASURE DUMPED ALL LIVING THINGS TOGETHER. A NICE PLACE TO VISIT...

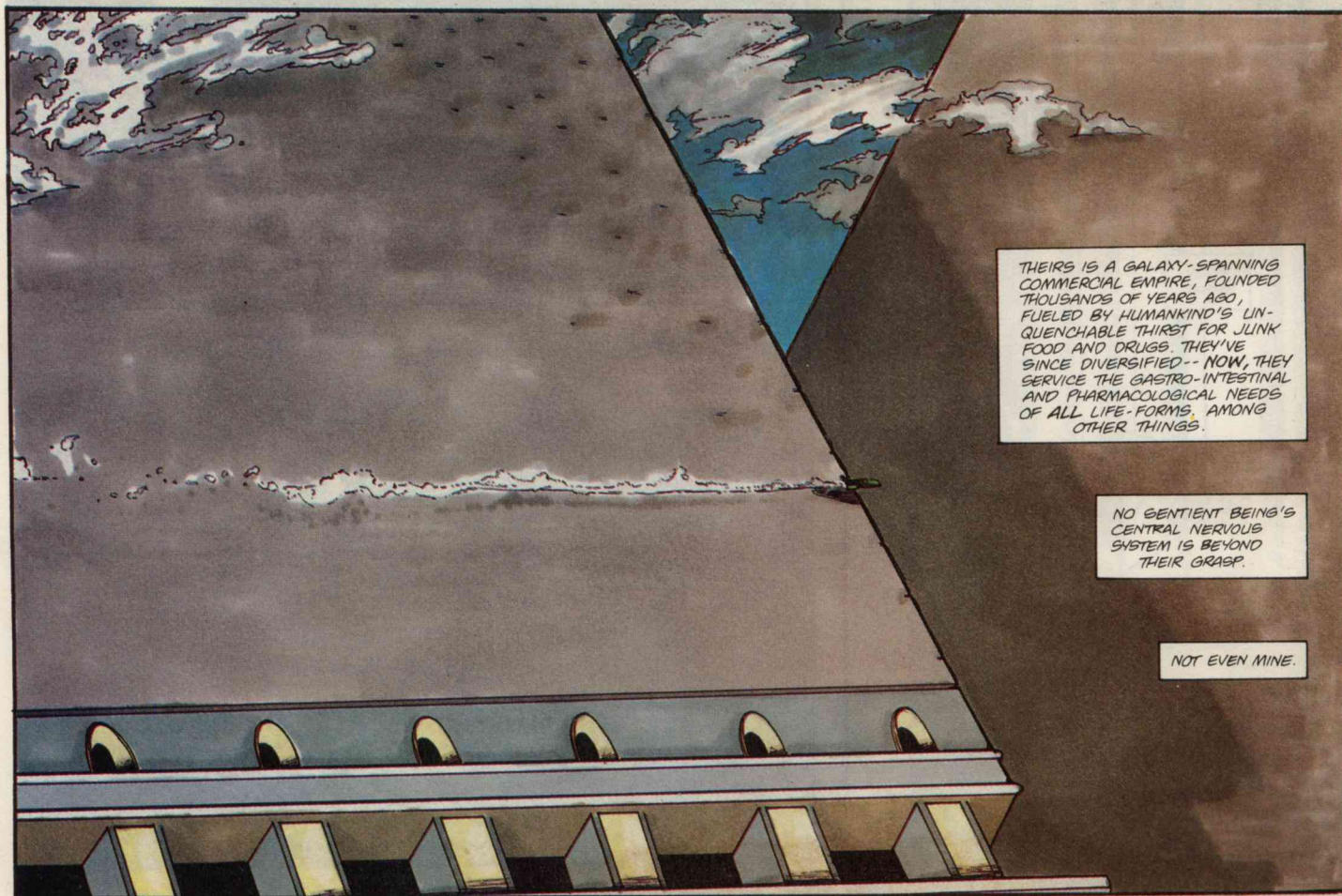
...BUT NOWHERE ANYONE SANE WOULD WANT TO LIVE.





COCA-FARBEN CORPORATE HEADQUARTERS.

THINK OF IT AS A  
MOBILE HOME FOR  
ROBBER BARONS.

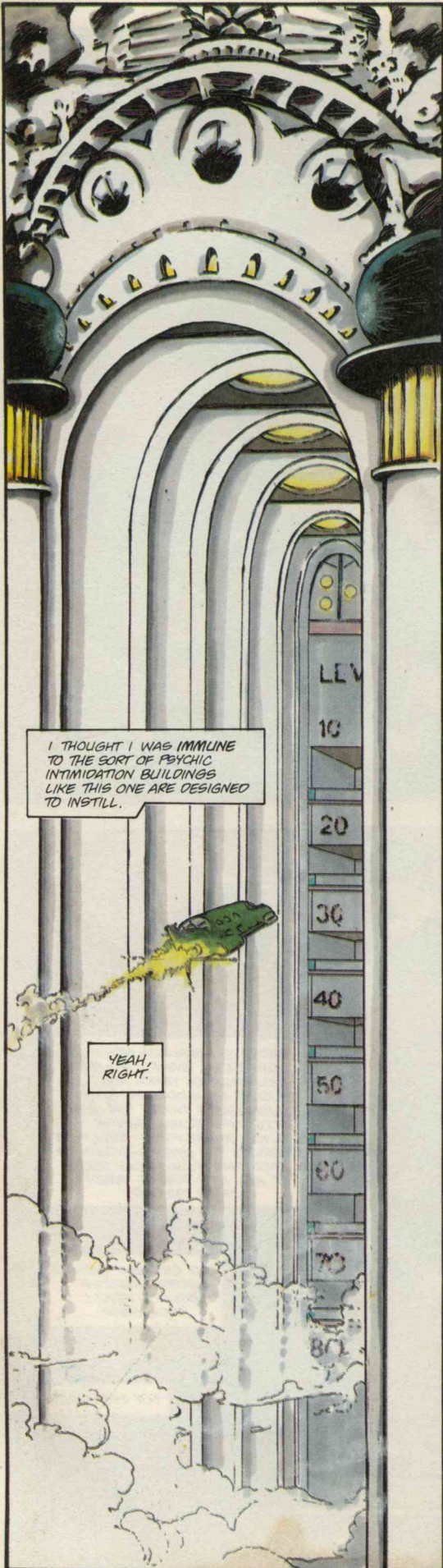


THEIRS IS A GALAXY-SPANNING  
COMMERCIAL EMPIRE, FOUNDED  
THOUSANDS OF YEARS AGO,  
FUELED BY HUMANKIND'S UN-  
QUENCHABLE THIRST FOR JUNK  
FOOD AND DRUGS. THEY'VE  
SINCE DIVERSIFIED-- NOW, THEY  
SERVICE THE GASTRO-INTESTINAL  
AND PHARMACOLOGICAL NEEDS  
OF ALL LIFE-FORMS, AMONG  
OTHER THINGS.

NO SENTIENT BEING'S  
CENTRAL NERVOUS  
SYSTEM IS BEYOND  
THEIR GRASP.

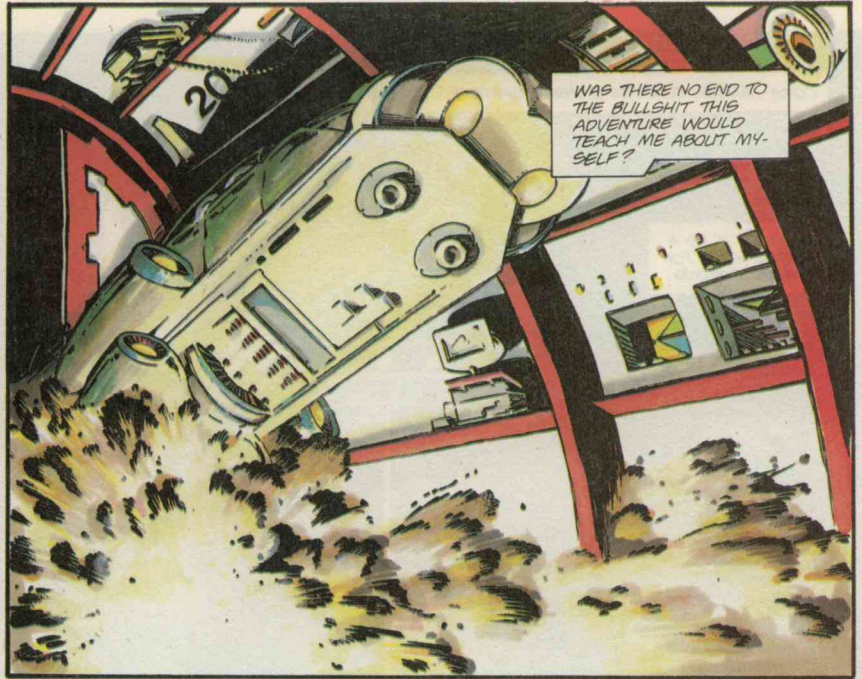
NOT EVEN MINE.



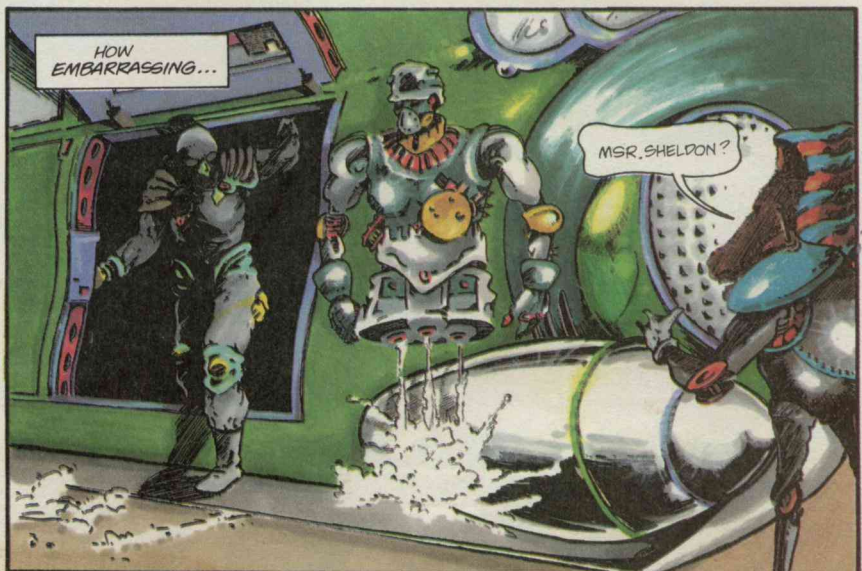
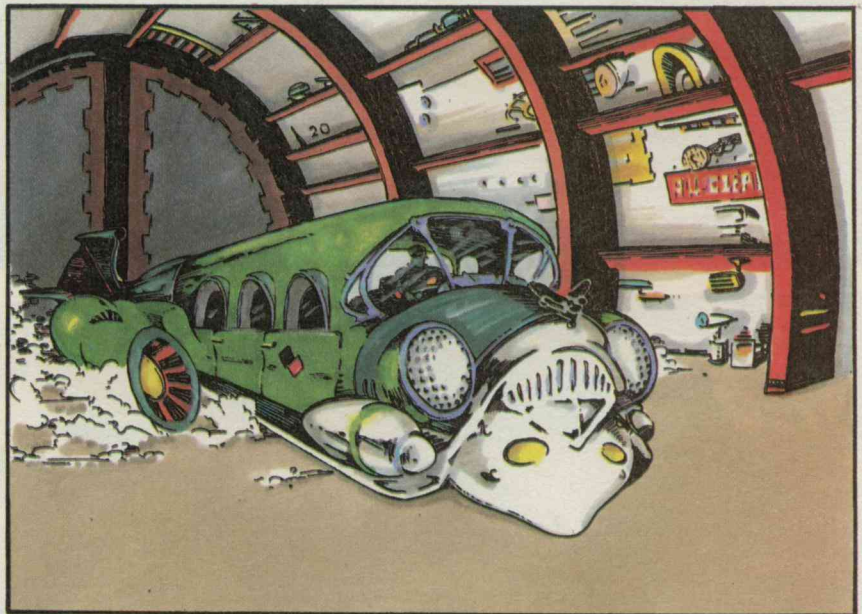


I THOUGHT I WAS IMMUNE TO THE SORT OF PSYCHIC INTIMIDATION BUILDINGS LIKE THIS ONE ARE DESIGNED TO INSTILL.

YEAH, RIGHT.



WAS THERE NO END TO THE BULLSHIT THIS ADVENTURE WOULD TEACH ME ABOUT MYSELF?



HOW EMBARRASSING...

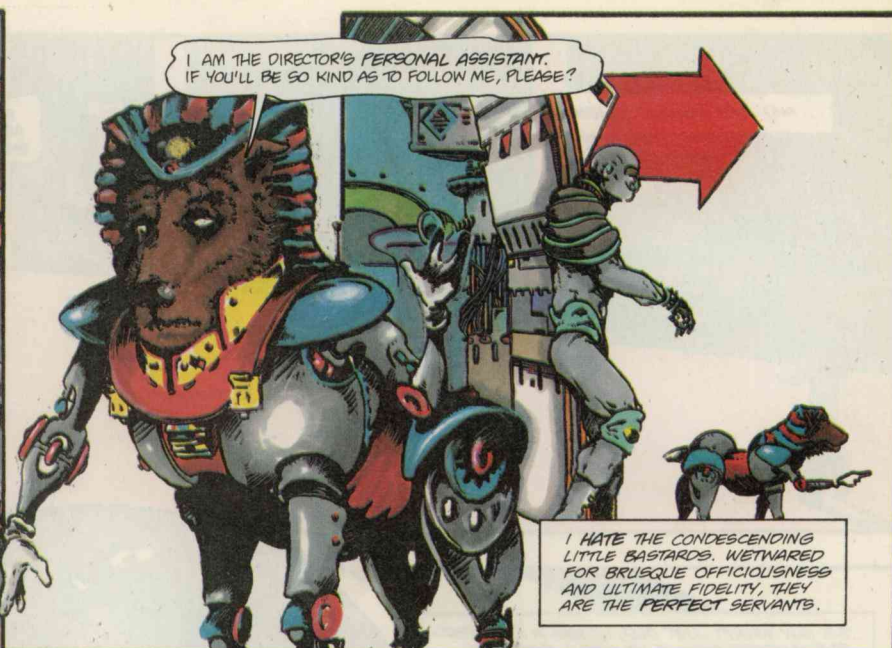
MSR. SHELTON?





DOWN HERE,  
MR. SHELTON.

A GODDAMN LITTLE DOGBOT  
WAS THERE TO MEET ME.



I AM THE DIRECTOR'S PERSONAL ASSISTANT.  
IF YOU'LL BE SO KIND AS TO FOLLOW ME, PLEASE?

I HATE THE CONDESCENDING  
LITTLE BASTARDS. WETWEARED  
FOR BRUSQUE OFFICIOSNESS  
AND ULTIMATE FIDELITY, THEY  
ARE THE PERFECT SERVANTS.



THE DIRECTOR IS  
MOST EAGER TO  
MEET YOU.

YEAH, THEY ALL ARE, THE PEOPLE WHO  
WANT TO HIRE ME. THEY WANT TO SEE  
IF I LOOK LIKE A FREAK--WHETHER  
THEY CAN TELL I'M A POLYMORPH THE  
MINUTE I WALK INTO THE ROOM.



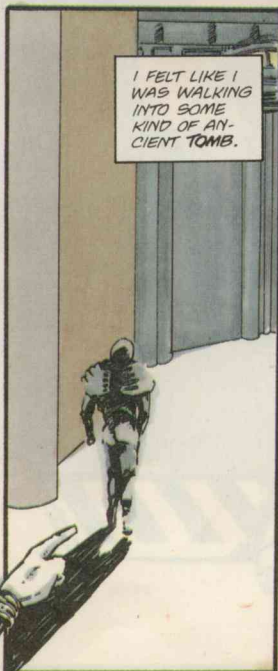
DON'T WORRY YOUR  
LITTLE SILICON BRAIN-  
CHIP ABOUT IT,  
SHORT STUFF...

I SHOULD INFORM YOU THAT THE  
DIRECTOR IS IN A VERY FRAGILE STATE  
OF HEALTH, AND SHOULDN'T BE SUBJECT  
TO VERY MUCH STRESS. YOU HAVE NO  
SURPRISES PLANNED FOR THIS MEETING,  
I HOPE?

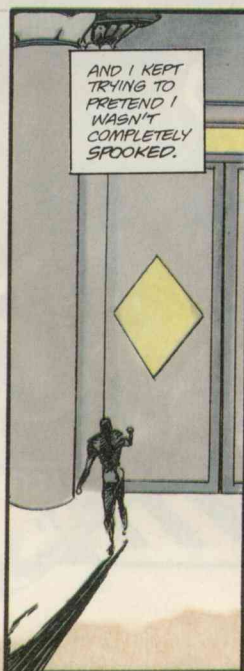


I WON'T PULL  
ANYTHING--AS  
LONG AS HE  
DOESN'T.

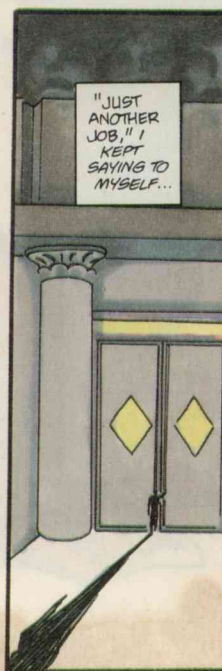
VERY WELL. THE  
DIRECTOR IS  
WAITING FOR YOU  
IN HIS OFFICE,  
THROUGH THOSE  
DOORS THERE.



I FELT LIKE I  
WAS WALKING  
INTO SOME  
KIND OF AN-  
CIENT TOMB.



AND I KEPT  
TRYING TO  
PRETEND I  
WASN'T  
COMPLETELY  
SPOOKED.



"JUST  
ANOTHER  
JOB," I  
KEPT  
SAYING TO  
MYSELF...





... AND JUST ANOTHER CLIENT.

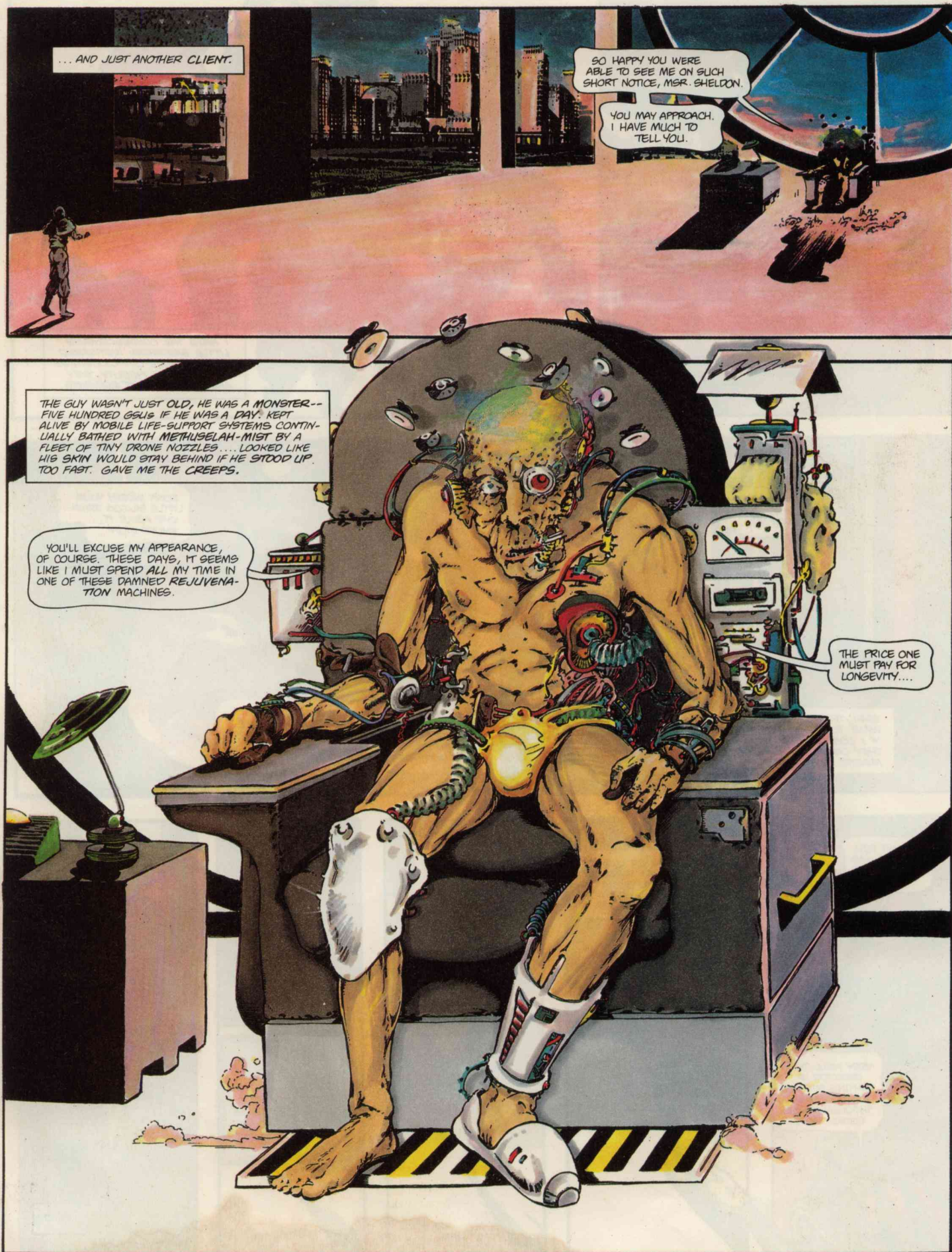
SO HAPPY YOU WERE  
ABLE TO SEE ME ON SUCH  
SHORT NOTICE, MRS. SHELDON.

YOU MAY APPROACH.  
I HAVE MUCH TO  
TELL YOU.

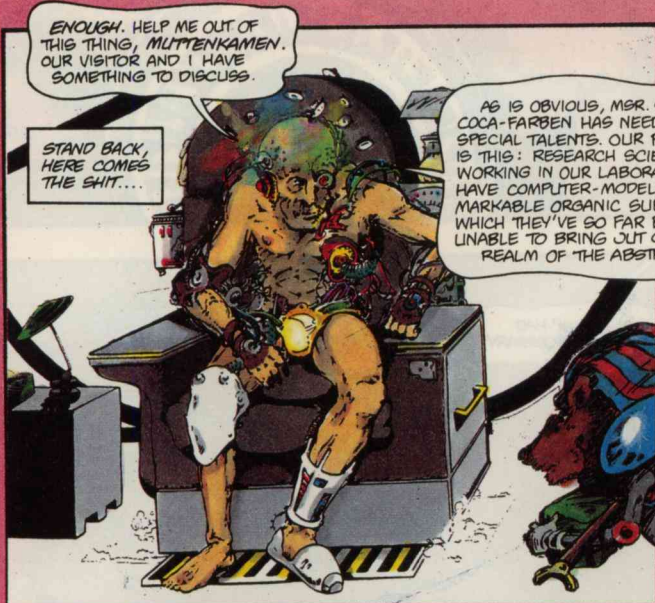
THE GUY WASN'T JUST OLD, HE WAS A MONSTER--  
FIVE HUNDRED GSUS IF HE WAS A DAY. KEPT  
ALIVE BY MOBILE LIFE-SUPPORT SYSTEMS CONTINU-  
ALLY BATHED WITH METHUSELAH-MIST BY A  
FLEET OF TINY DRONE NOZZLES.... LOOKED LIKE  
HIS SKIN WOULD STAY BEHIND IF HE STOOD UP.  
TOO FAST. GAVE ME THE CREEPS.

YOU'LL EXCUSE MY APPEARANCE,  
OF COURSE. THESE DAYS, IT SEEMS  
LIKE I MUST SPEND ALL MY TIME IN  
ONE OF THESE DAMNED REJUVENA-  
TION MACHINES.

THE PRICE ONE  
MUST PAY FOR  
LONGEVITY....







ENOUGH. HELP ME OUT OF THIS THING, MUTTENKAMEN. OUR VISITOR AND I HAVE SOMETHING TO DISCUSS.

STAND BACK, HERE COMES THE SHIT....

AS IS OBVIOUS, MRS. SHELTON, COCA-FARBEN HAS NEED OF YOUR SPECIAL TALENTS. OUR PROBLEM IS THIS: RESEARCH SCIENTISTS WORKING IN OUR LABORATORIES HAVE COMPUTER-MODELED A REMARKABLE ORGANIC SUBSTANCE, WHICH THEY'VE SO FAR BEEN UNABLE TO BRING OUT OF THE REALM OF THE ABSTRACT.



THEY THEORIZE THAT ONCE THIS CONCOCTION OF THEIRS IS INTRODUCED INTO A LIVING ORGANIC SYSTEM, IT WOULD ALTER CELLULAR FUNCTIONING SUCH THAT ALL AGE-RELATED DECRETITUDE WOULD STOP.



YES, AS YOU MIGHT SURMISE, I HAVE A GREAT DEAL OF PERSONAL INTEREST IN SUCH A LIFE-PROLONGING PRODUCT.



TO SAY NOTHING OF ITS OBVIOUS MARKET VALUE TO COCA-FARBEN.

BUT THOSE INTERESTS ARE TRIVIAL COMPARED WITH THE POTENTIAL FOR UNIVERSAL GOOD SUCH A PRODUCT HOLDS WITHIN ITS SUB-GENETIC STRUCTURE.



IMAGINE THE SORT OF CIVILIZATION, THE ACHIEVEMENTS, THAT COULD BE BUILT BY BEINGS OF ETERNAL LIFE! THE POSSIBILITIES ARE LIMITLESS!

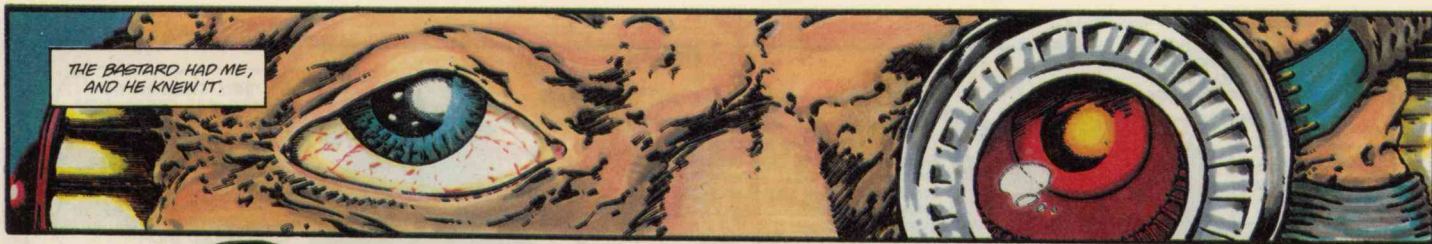
SOMEHOW, THE OLD WHEEZEBAG'S RAGING CASE OF ALTRUISM WASN'T CONTAGIOUS. I WAITED FOR HIS NEXT MOVE. I KNEW WHAT WAS COMING. AND HE KNEW I KNEW. IT WAS BORINGLY INEVITABLE....



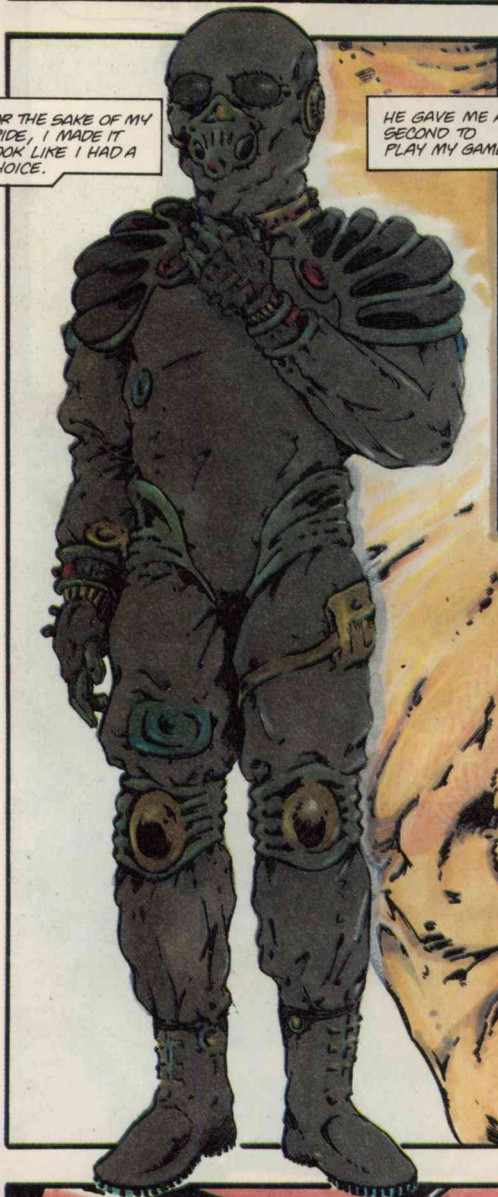
I UNDERSTAND YOUR OWN AGING PROCESS IS ACCELERATED BY YOUR, UH, CONDITION. IS THAT TRUE?

BINGO.





THE BASTARD HAD ME,  
AND HE KNEW IT.



FOR THE SAKE OF MY  
PRIDE, I MADE IT  
LOOK LIKE I HAD A  
CHOICE.

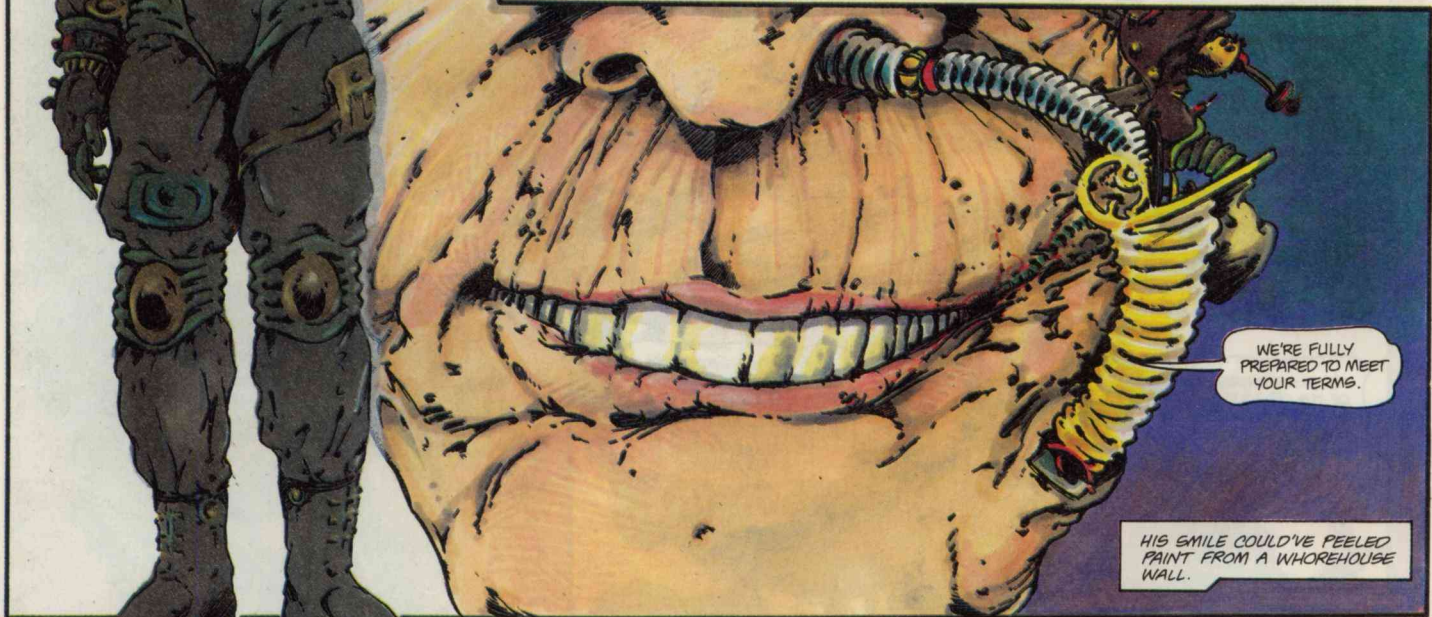
HE GAVE ME A  
SECOND TO  
PLAY MY GAME.



THIS CHIP HAS  
ALL THE NECESSARY  
DATA.



THIS IS  
GONNA  
COST  
YOU....



WE'RE FULLY  
PREPARED TO MEET  
YOUR TERMS.

HIS SMILE COULD'VE PEELED  
PAINT FROM A WHOREHOUSE  
WALL.

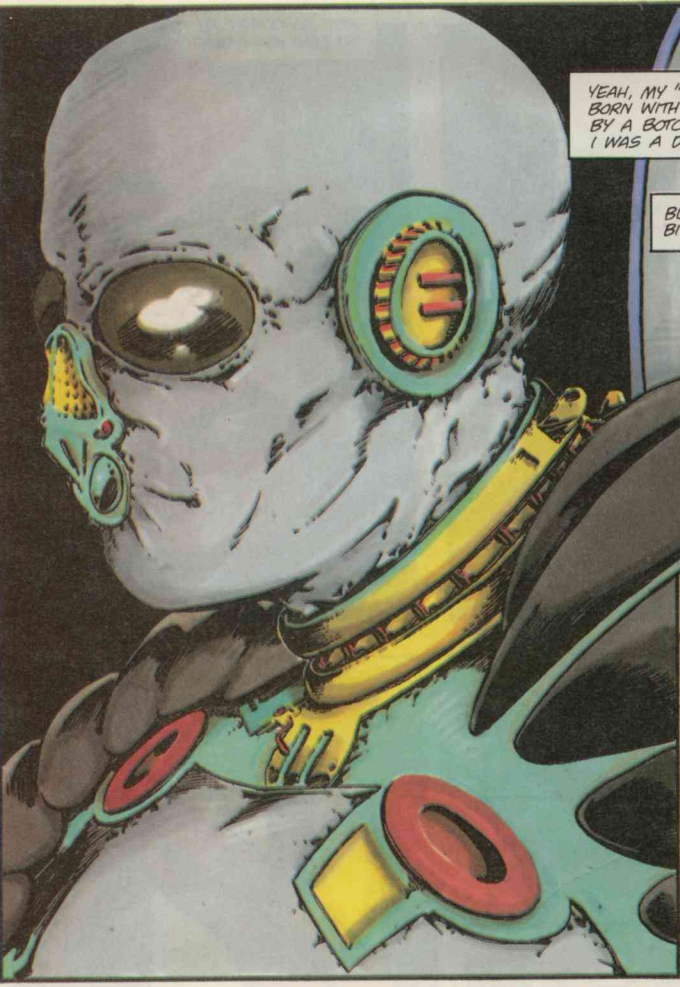


PLUS, I SUSPECT YOU'LL  
REQUIRE USE OF OUR PRODUCT  
WHEN YOU'VE COMPLETED ITS  
ASSEMBLY-- IF IT DOESN'T  
KILL YOU FIRST....

YEAH, WHICH MEANS THE SOONER  
YOU TRANSFER A GIGA-CRED ADVANCE  
INTO MY ACCOUNT, THE SOONER WE CAN  
BOTH RECAPTURE OUR LOST YOUTH.

DON'T  
WAIT UP....



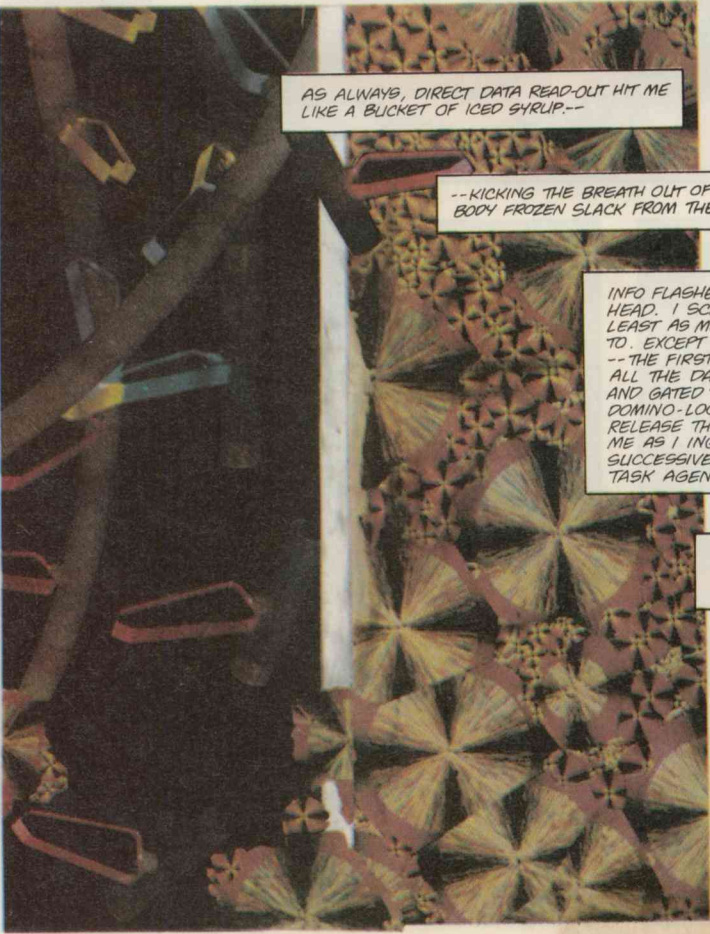
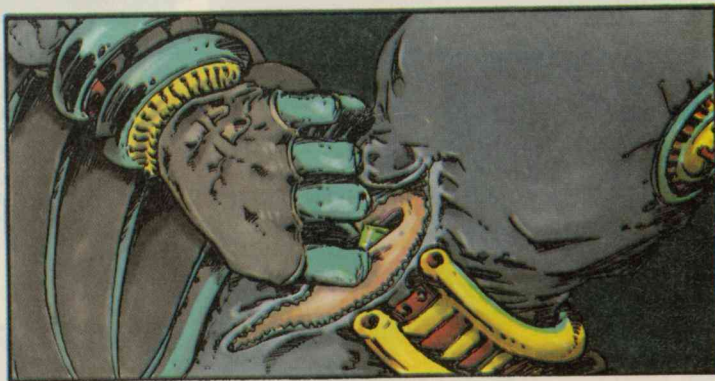


YEAH, MY "CONDITION" HE CALLED IT. LIKE I WAS BORN WITH IT OR SOMETHING, AND NOT VICTIMIZED BY A BOTCHED DESIGNER-DNA EXPERIMENT WHEN I WAS A DUMBSHIT TEENAGER.

BUT I'VE LONG SINCE GOTTEN OVER MY BITTERNESS ABOUT THAT, HAVEN'T I?

YEAH, LONG SINCE....

TIME TO ACCESS THE DATA ON THE DIRECTOR'S CHIP, AND SEE WHAT SORT OF HELLISH SHIT I HAD TO LOOK FORWARD TO.



AS ALWAYS, DIRECT DATA READ-OUT HIT ME LIKE A BUCKET OF ICED SYRUP.--

--KICKING THE BREATH OUT OF ME, AND LEAVING MY BODY FROZEN SLACK FROM THE NECK DOWN.

INFO FLASHED PAINFULLY IN MY HEAD. I SCANNED IT--OR AT LEAST AS MUCH AS I WAS ALLOWED TO. EXCEPT FOR THE PRIMARY BIT--THE FIRST LEG OF MY TRIP--ALL THE DATA WAS BLOCKED, AND GATED TO A BIOFEEDBACK DOMINO-LOOP PROGRAMMED TO RELEASE THE NEXT INFO-BIT TO ME AS I INGESTED EACH SUCCESSIVE SUBSTANCE ON MY TASK AGENDA.

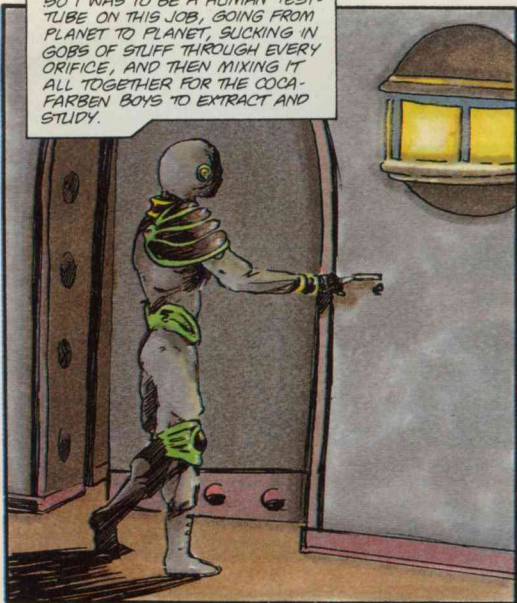
WHICH IS LIKE PUSHING SOMEONE DOWN A DARK STAIRCASE THAT ILLUMINATES ONE STEP AT A TIME, AFTER YOU'VE FALLEN ON IT....

MORE CONFORMATION THAT THIS WAS A FUCKED DEAL FROM THE OUTSET.

TOO BAD I WASN'T PAYING ATTENTION.



SO I WAS TO BE A HUMAN TEST-TUBE ON THIS JOB, GOING FROM PLANET TO PLANET, SUCKING IN GOBS OF STUFF THROUGH EVERY ORIFICE, AND THEN MIXING IT ALL TOGETHER FOR THE COCA-FARBEN BOYS TO EXTRACT AND STUDY.



I GUESS I'VE DONE WORSE FOR LESS.



BUT DON'T ASK ME TO TELL YOU WHEN.



IT WAS THE PAYOFF THAT WAS BLINDING ME TO ALL MY INTERNAL ALARM SIGNALS-- THE PROSPECT OF INFINITELY EXTENDING THE RAPIDLY SHRINKING PROBABILITY POOL THAT WAS MY FUTURE.



I WAS TRAPPED, YOU SEE. I HAD TO USE THIS FUCKED "TALENT" OF MINE TO LIVE-- BUT EACH TIME I USED IT, IT KILLED ME JUST A LITTLE BIT MORE.



AND IT'S TIMES LIKE THIS ONE-- WHEN I'M ABOUT TO UNDERGO ANOTHER TRANSFORMATION-- THAT'RE ALWAYS THE WORST. I START WONDERING WHETHER ANY OF THIS IS WORTH KILLING MYSELF OVER. USUALLY IT ISN'T. SOMETIMES I TALK MYSELF OUT OF GOING THROUGH IT AGAIN. THIS TIME CLEARLY WAS WORTH IT. I WANTED TO LIVE.



REACHING INWARD, I FIRED THE NEURAL CIRCUIT, AND STARTED THE TRANSFORMATION. THE PAIN, AS ALWAYS, WAS WAITING...







...AND, AS ALWAYS, IT WAS WORSE THAN I REMEMBERED IT. WORSE THAN I THOUGHT IT COULD EVER BE.

MY BODY BURNED WITH THE INTENSITY OF A SUN GONE NOVA.

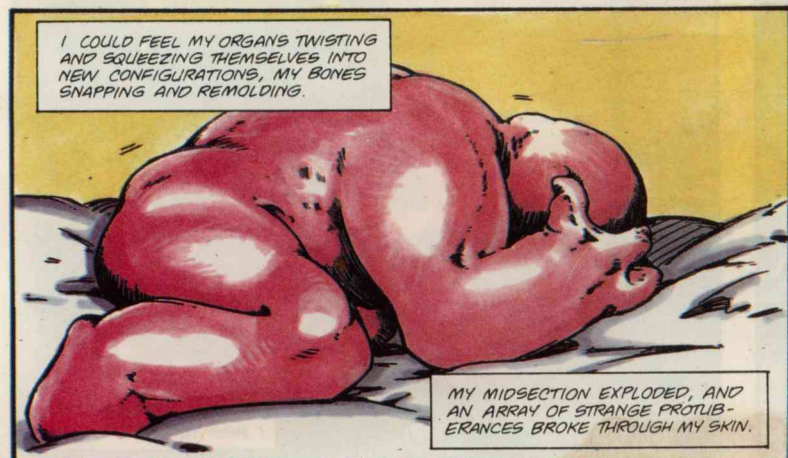


SUBATOMIC FIRE GEYSERED UP MY SPINE.

MY BLOOD SIZZLED, AND MY SKIN STARTED TO STRETCH.

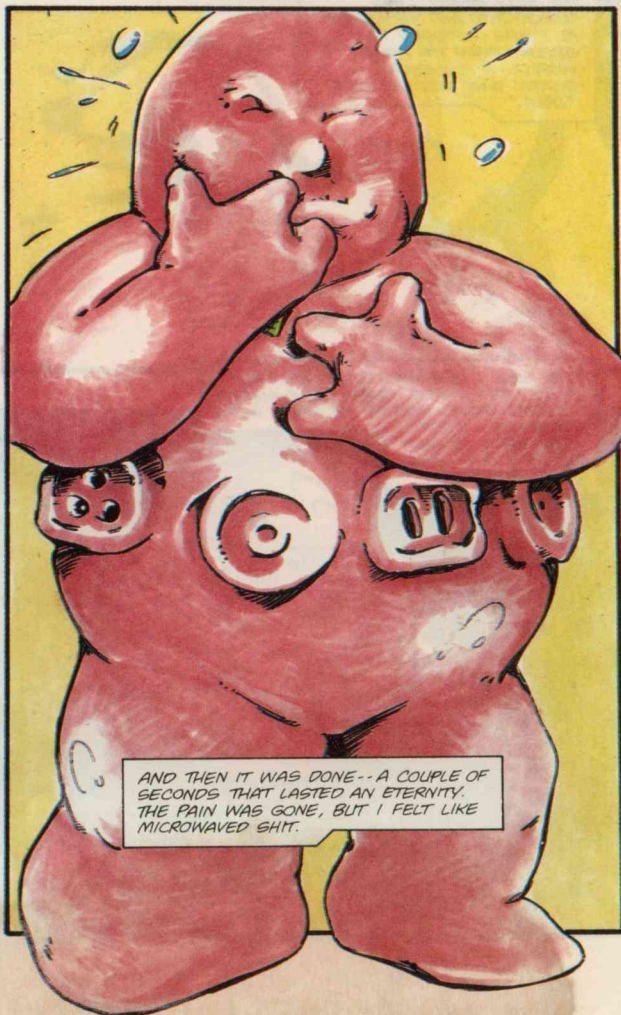


FOLLOWING THE TEMPLATE-PROGRAM DOWNLOADED FROM THE COCA-FARBEN CHIP, MY BODY BEGAN ITS MOLECULAR TRANSFORMATION.



I COULD FEEL MY ORGANS TWISTING AND SQUEEZING THEMSELVES INTO NEW CONFIGURATIONS, MY BONES SNAPPING AND REMOLDING.

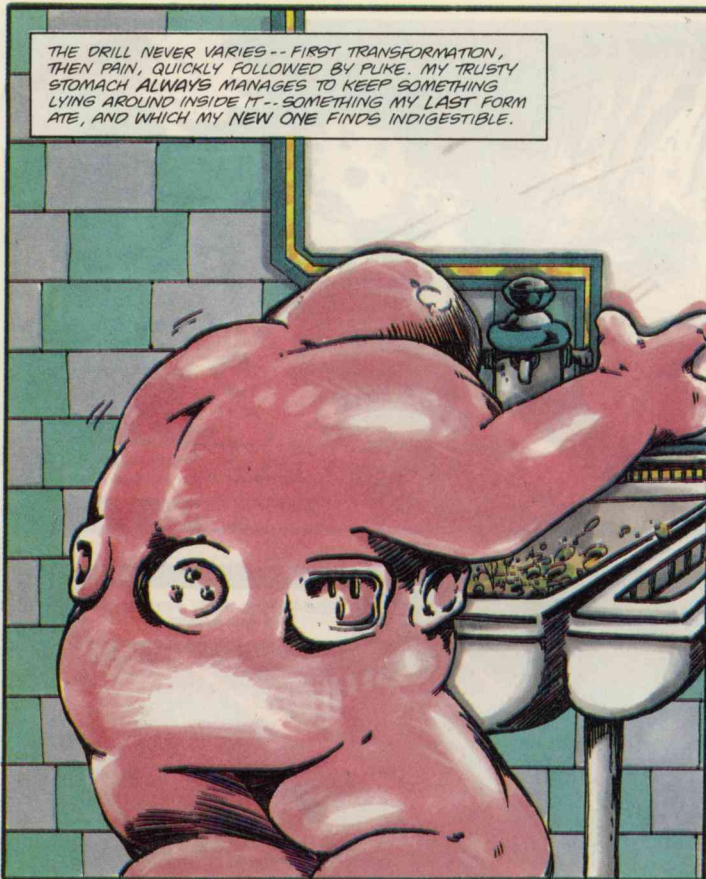
MY MIDSECTION EXPLODED, AND AN ARRAY OF STRANGE PROTUBERANCES BROKE THROUGH MY SKIN.



AND THEN IT WAS DONE--A COUPLE OF SECONDS THAT LASTED AN ETERNITY. THE PAIN WAS GONE, BUT I FELT LIKE MICROWAVED SHIT.



THE DRILL NEVER VARIES -- FIRST TRANSFORMATION, THEN PAIN, QUICKLY FOLLOWED BY PUKE. MY TRUSTY STOMACH ALWAYS MANAGES TO KEEP SOMETHING LYING AROUND INSIDE IT -- SOMETHING MY LAST FORM ATE, AND WHICH MY NEW ONE FINDS INDIGESTIBLE.



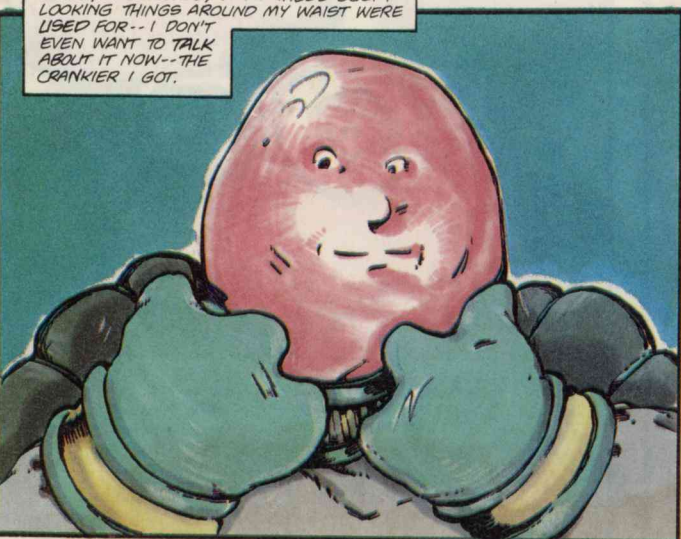
GET A LOAD OF THIS BEAUTY IN THE MIRROR. WHY IS IT I ONLY GET TO CHANGE INTO PLUG-UGLY LIFE-FORMS ALL THE TIME, huh? MY LIFE REALLY STINKS....



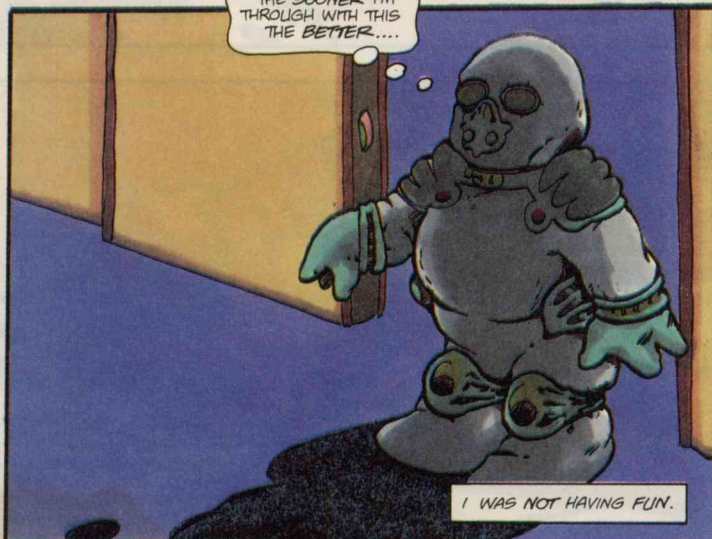
THE CHIP DOWNLOADED MORE INFORMATION INTO MY CONSCIOUS-ACCESSIBLE FOREBRAIN, BRIEFING ME ON THE SILLY BEAST I HAD TURNED INTO AND THE MATERIAL I WAS SUPPOSED TO SECURE FROM ITS HOME-WORLD -- A PLANETARY SYSTEM THAT SOUNDED LIKE "LALA."



THE MORE I LEARNED ABOUT THIS LALA PLACE, AND WORSE, WHAT THESE GOOFY-LOOKING THINGS AROUND MY WAIST WERE USED FOR -- I DON'T EVEN WANT TO TALK ABOUT IT NOW -- THE CRANKIER I GOT.

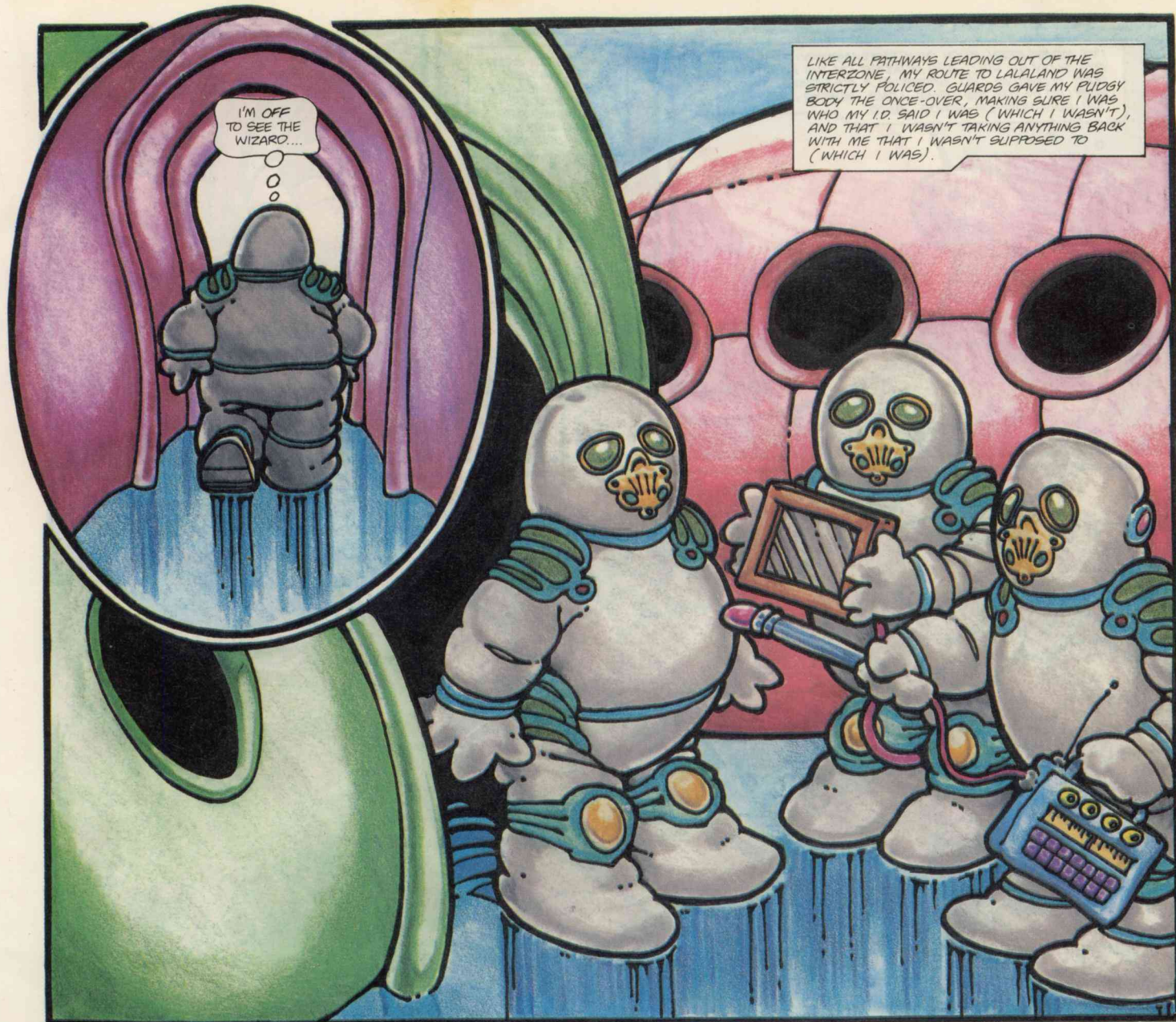


THE SOONER I'M THROUGH WITH THIS THE BETTER....



I WAS NOT HAVING FUN.





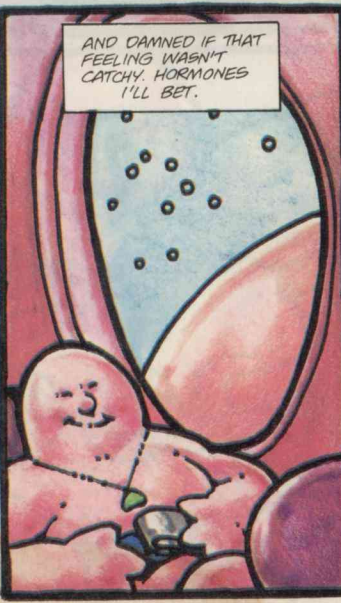
LIKE ALL PATHWAYS LEADING OUT OF THE INTERZONE, MY ROUTE TO LALALAND WAS STRICTLY POLICED. GUARDS GAVE MY PUDGY BODY THE ONCE-OVER, MAKING SURE I WAS WHO MY I.D. SAID I WAS (WHICH I WASN'T), AND THAT I WASN'T TAKING ANYTHING BACK WITH ME THAT I WASN'T SUPPOSED TO (WHICH I WAS).



BUT I PASSED THEIR MACHINE-MUSTER WITHOUT A HITCH, AND THEY WAVED ME ON TO A SHIP WAITING TO ROCKET OFF TO LALALAND.

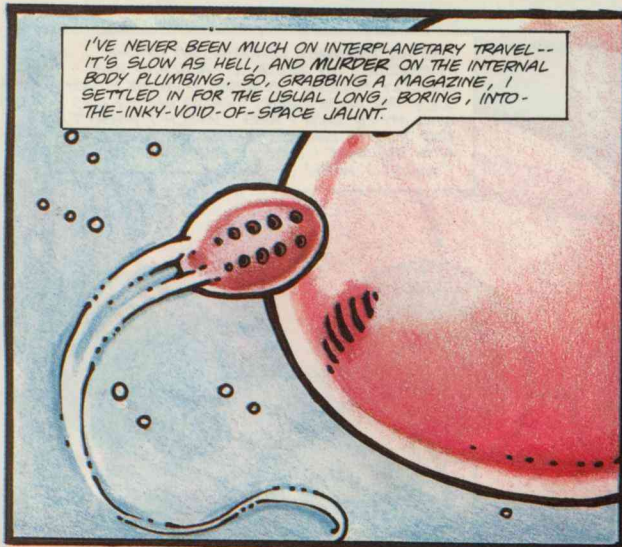


WHAT A HAPPY-LOOKING BLUNCH THOSE LALALIANS WERE....



AND DAMNED IF THAT FEELING WASN'T CATCHY. HORMONES I'LL BET.





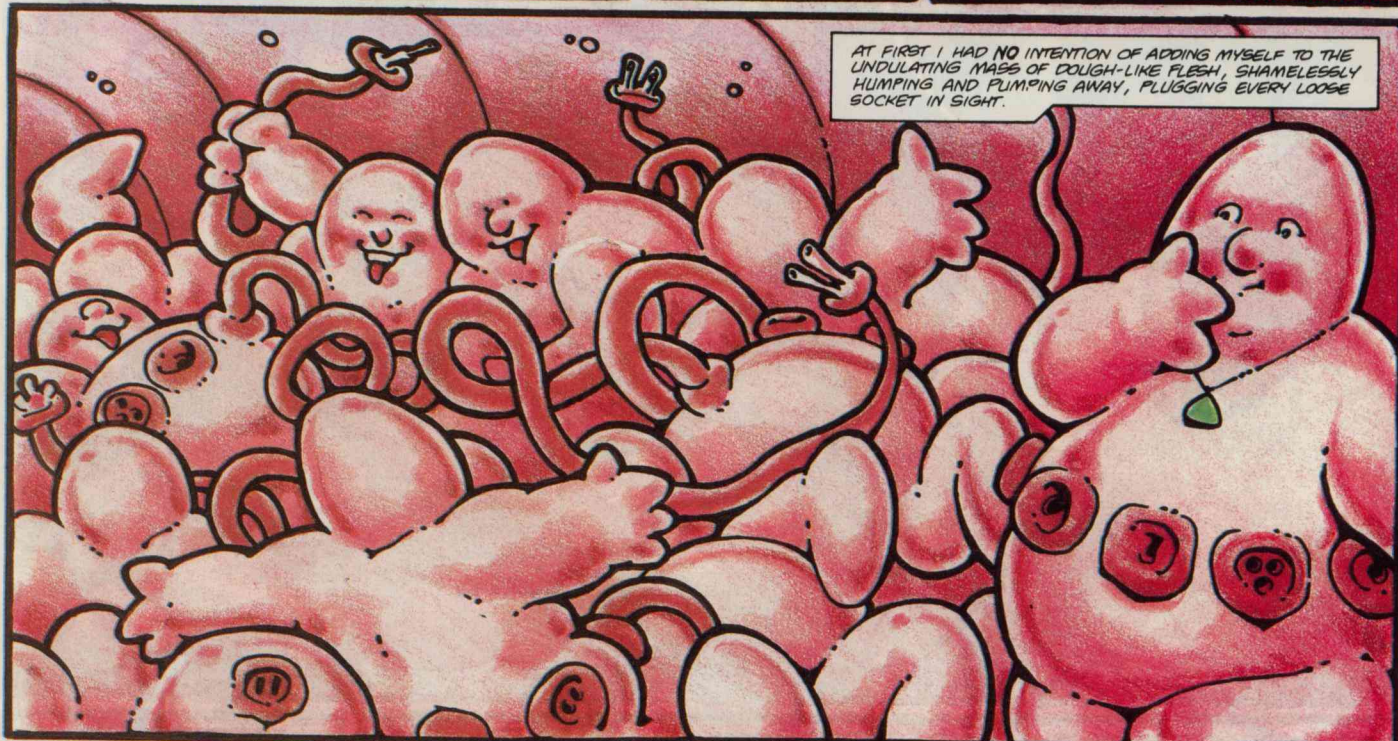
I'VE NEVER BEEN MUCH ON INTERPLANETARY TRAVEL-- IT'S SLOW AS HELL, AND MURDER ON THE INTERNAL BODY PLUMBING. SO, GRABBING A MAGAZINE, I SETTLED IN FOR THE USUAL LONG, BORING, INTO-THE-INKY-VOID-OF-SPACE JAUNT.



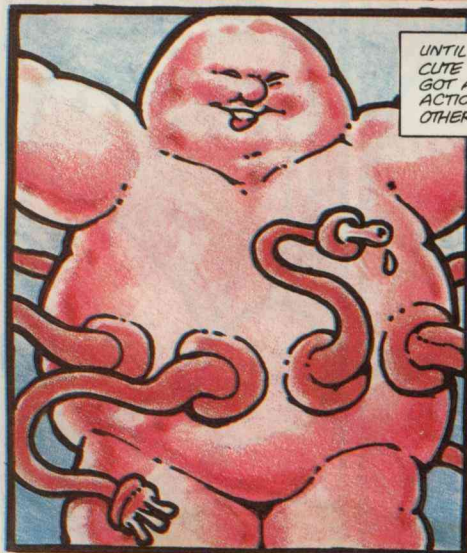
AND DISCOVERED THE RATHER UNIQUE LALALIAN METHOD OF LIVENING UP DULL ZERO-G SPACE JOURNEYS....



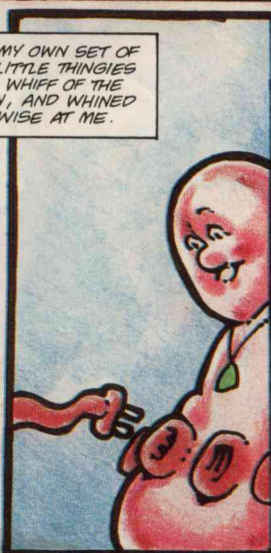
A FUN-LOVING BUNCH INDEED.



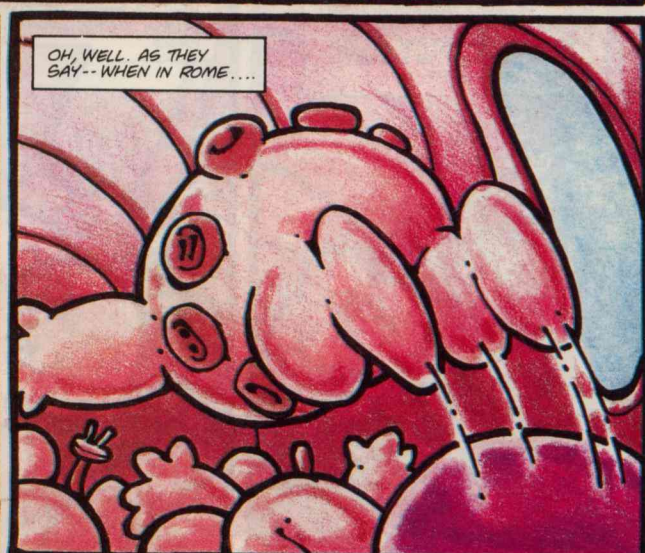
AT FIRST I HAD NO INTENTION OF ADDING MYSELF TO THE UNDULATING MASS OF DOUGH-LIKE FLESH, SHAMELESSLY HUMMING AND PUMPING AWAY, PLUGGING EVERY LOOSE SOCKET IN SIGHT.



UNTIL MY OWN SET OF CUTE LITTLE THINGIES GOT A WHIFF OF THE ACTION, AND WHINED OTHERWISE AT ME.



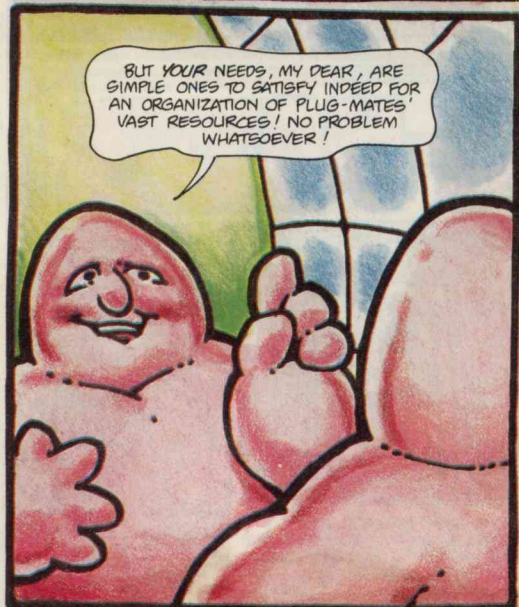
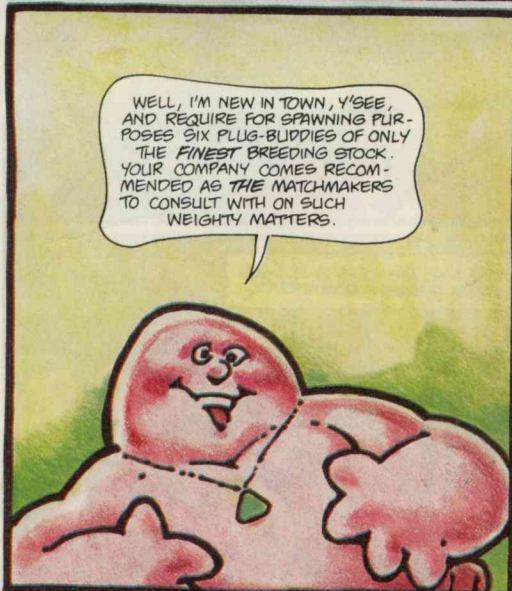
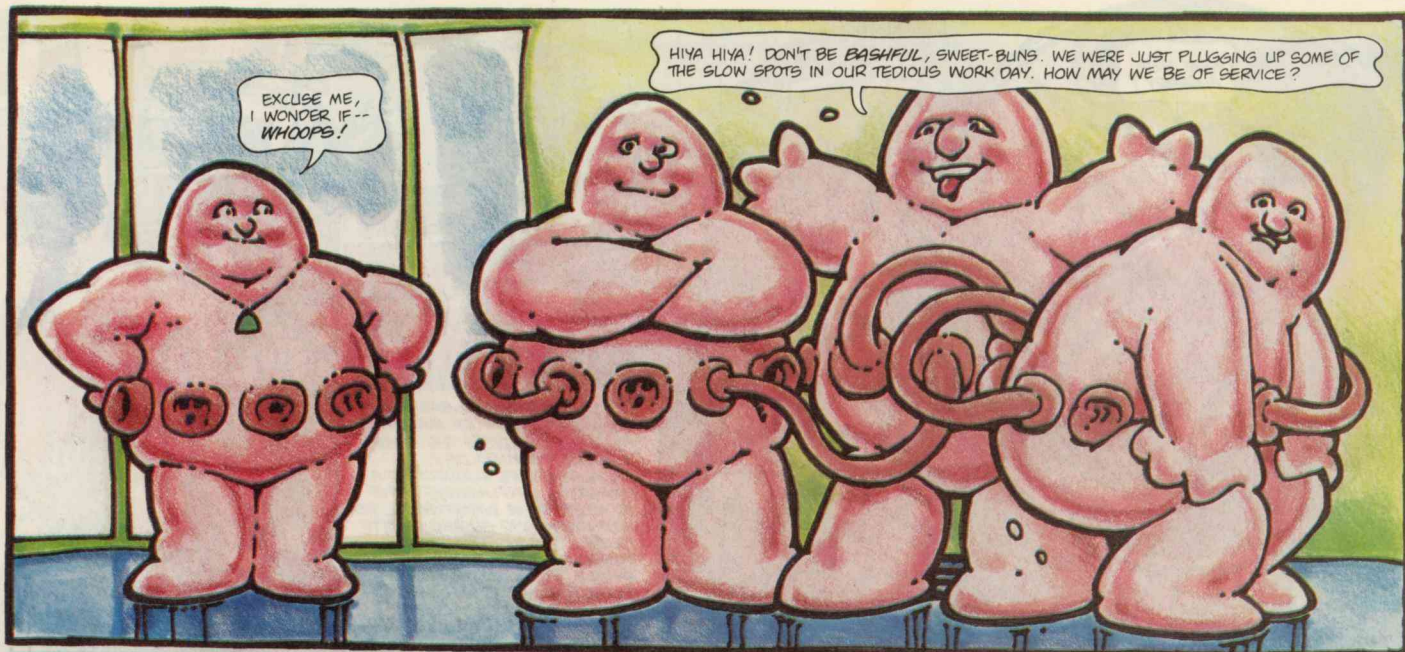
OH, WELL. AS THEY SAY--WHEN IN ROME....















SHOULDN'T  
TAKE BUT A  
MOMENT,  
SWEET-  
CAKES....

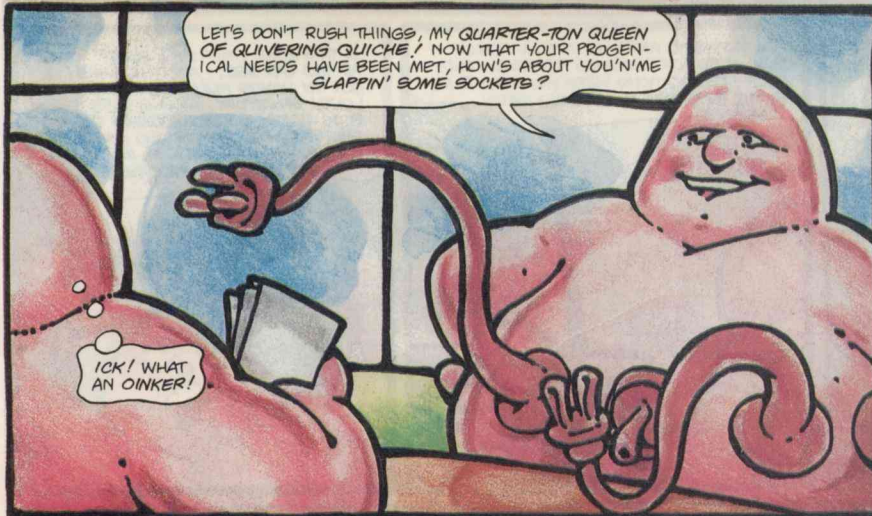


VOILA! A SEXTET  
OF SEX-PETS FOR MY  
MARSHMALLOW  
MOMMA!



THE DOUGHBOY GEEK WAS GETTING A TAD  
TOO FAMILIAR FOR MY TASTES. I HAD A  
GOOD IDEA OF WHAT WAS COMING....

THIS OUGHTA COVER  
IT, HMM?



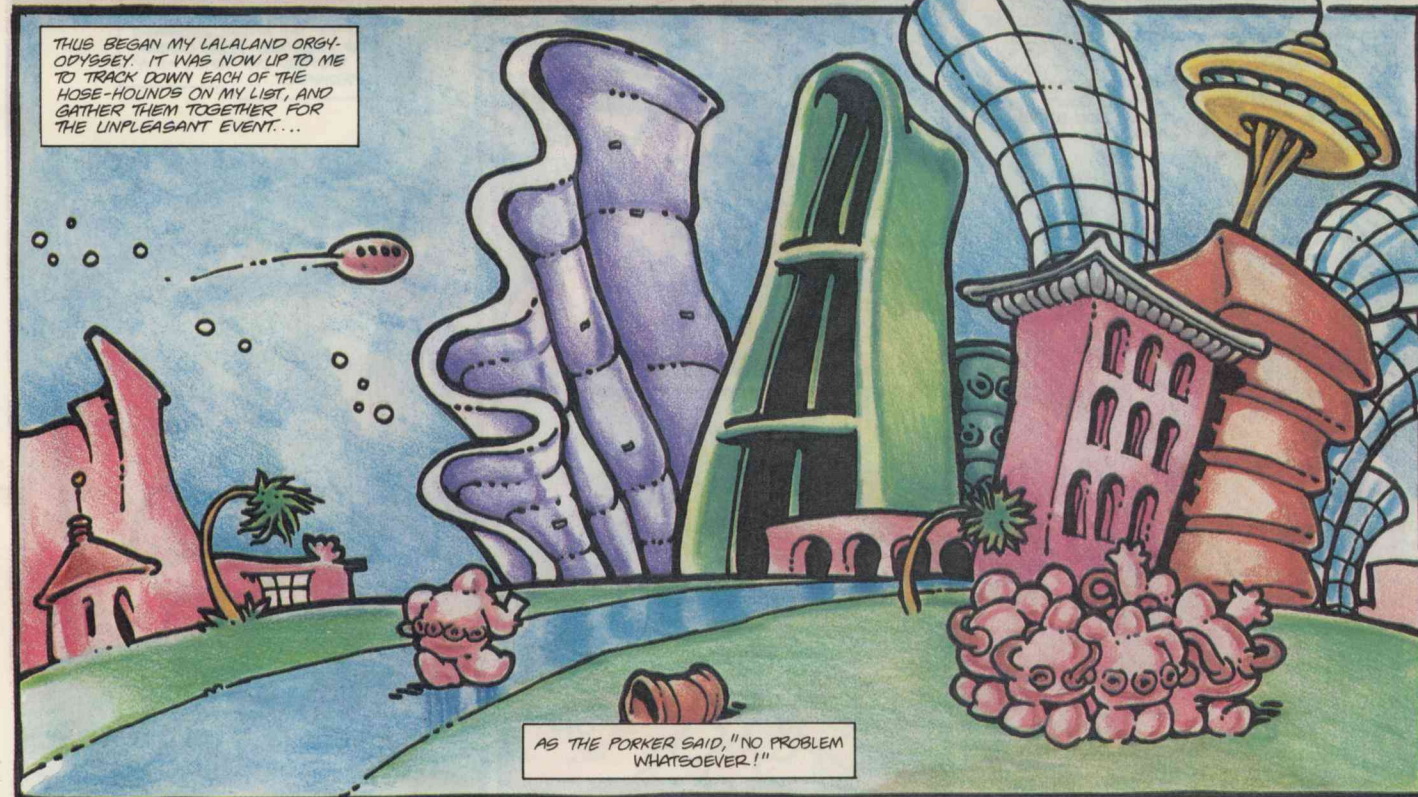
LET'S DON'T RUSH THINGS, MY QUARTER-TON QUEEN  
OF QUIVERING QUIICHE! NOW THAT YOUR PROGEN-  
ICAL NEEDS HAVE BEEN MET, HOW'S ABOUT YOU'N' ME  
SLAPPIN' SOME SOCKETS?

ICK! WHAT  
AN OINKER!



MAYBE SOME OTHER TIME,  
SWINE-SWEAT! I'VE GOT A HOT  
DATE WITH SOME DOWNRIGHT  
ADORABLE DNA!

JEEZ -- THE SORT OF SHIT A HARDWORKING  
GIRL'S GOTTA PUT UP WITH SOMETIMES!



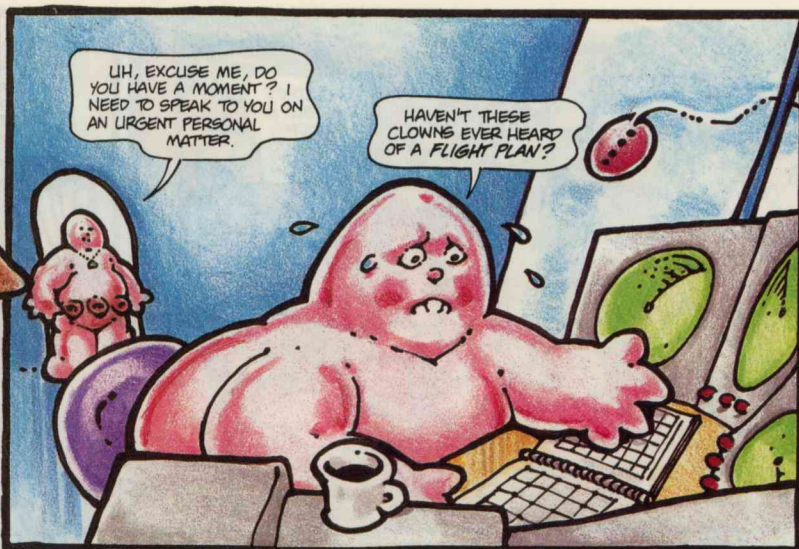
THIS BEGAN MY LALALAND ORGY-  
ODYSSEY. IT WAS NOW UP TO ME  
TO TRACK DOWN EACH OF THE  
HOSE-HOUNDS ON MY LIST, AND  
GATHER THEM TOGETHER FOR  
THE UNPLEASANT EVENT....

AS THE PORKER SAID, "NO PROBLEM  
WHATEVER!"



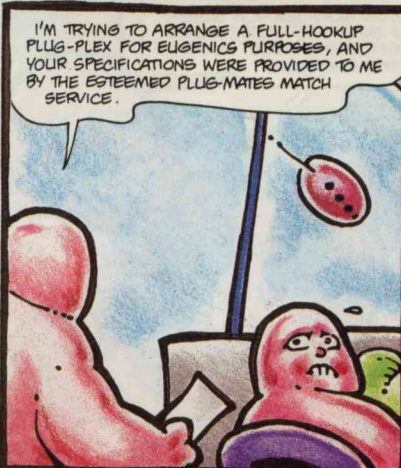


NON-PROBLEM #1....



UH, EXCUSE ME, DO YOU HAVE A MOMENT? I NEED TO SPEAK TO YOU ON AN URGENT PERSONAL MATTER.

HAVEN'T THESE CLOWNS EVER HEARD OF A FLIGHT PLAN?



I'M TRYING TO ARRANGE A FULL-HOOKUP PLUG-PLEX FOR EUGENICS PURPOSES, AND YOUR SPECIFICATIONS WERE PROVIDED TO ME BY THE ESTEEMED PLUG-MATES MATCH SERVICE.

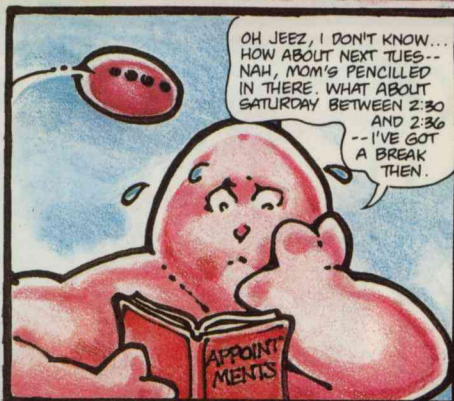


IS THIS SOME KINDA SICK GAG? 'CAUSE AS YOU CAN SEE, I AIN'T LAUGHING! I GOT MY HANDS FULL RUNNING THIS LOUSY SPACEPORT, MAKING SURE THESE PLUG-HAPPY ROCKET-JOCKEYS DON'T DROP DOWN ON TOP OF ONE ANOTHER! AND YOU WANNA TALK TO ME ABOUT SOME NOZZLE-NOOKIE?

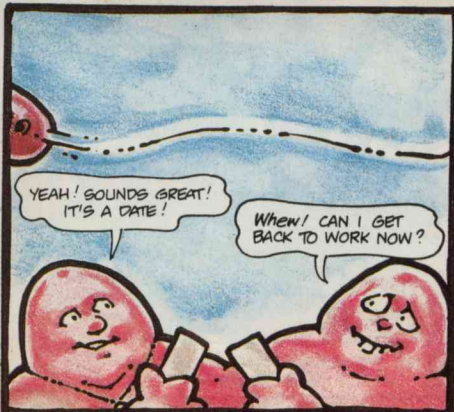


IT'LL BE A HEAP OF FUN, HONEST! AND IT WON'T TAKE LONG, EITHER--I PROMISE! SCIENCE WILL BE FOREVER GRATEFUL FOR YOUR SACRIFICE! YOU'LL MEET SEVERAL SWELL BABES! AND I'M SURE YOU NEED THE TIME OFF, ANYWAY-- YOU CAN'T JUGGLE AIRCARS ALL THE TIME! THINK OF THE DISAPPOINTMENT THE OTHERS WILL FEEL IF YOU DON'T COME! YOUR PLUGS ARE GETTING RUSTY, YOU GOTTA KEEP 'EM IN SHAPE!

DID I LEAVE ANYTHING OUT?

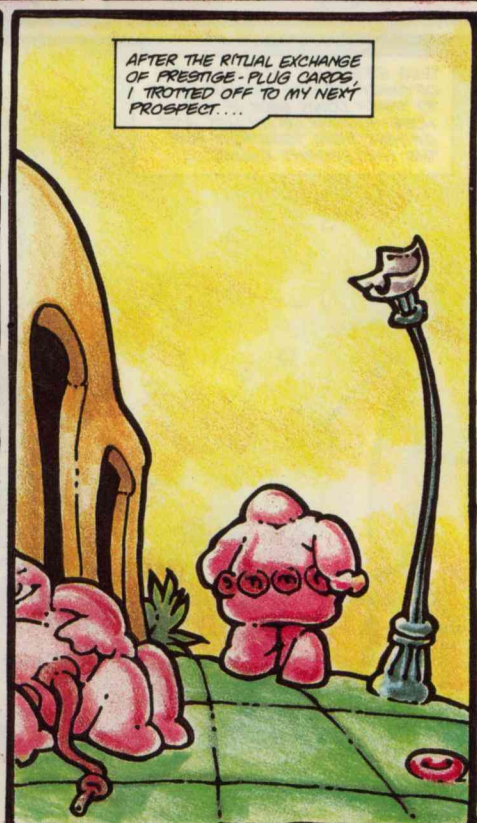


OH JEEZ, I DON'T KNOW... HOW ABOUT NEXT TUES-- NAH, MOM'S PENCILLED IN THERE. WHAT ABOUT SATURDAY BETWEEN 2:30 AND 2:36 -- I'VE GOT A BREAK THEN.



YEAH! SOUNDS GREAT! IT'S A DATE!

When! CAN I GET BACK TO WORK NOW?



AFTER THE RITUAL EXCHANGE OF PRESTIGE-PLUG CARDS, I TROTTED OFF TO MY NEXT PROSPECT....



NEXT ON THE LIST WAS A WAITER WHO, BY THE LOOK OF IT, COULDN'T BE TRUSTED TO DELIVER ALL THE FOOD HE WAS CARRYING TO THE TABLE IT WAS INTENDED FOR. HIS OWN MOUTH, I SUSPECT, SHORTSTOPPED A GREAT DEAL OF IT.



AN APPEAL TO HIS APPETITES SHOULD DO THE TRICK.



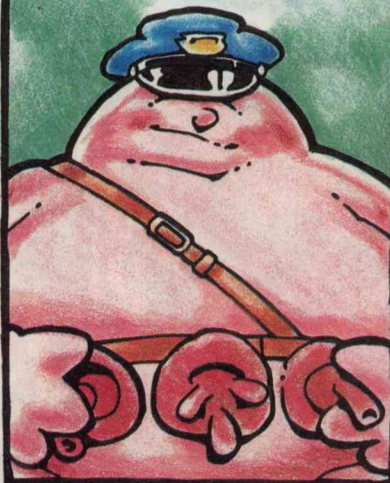
NEXT WAS ONE OF THE TOWN'S FEW WORKING GARBAGE GUYS....



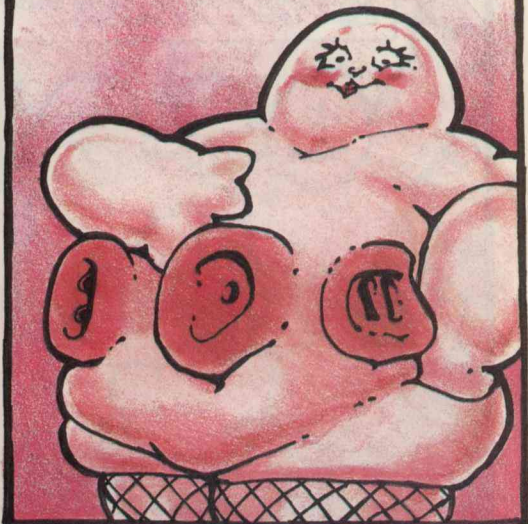
THEN A POLITICIAN, WHO DISINGENUOUSLY PRETENDED IGNORANCE OF SUCH AFFAIRS....



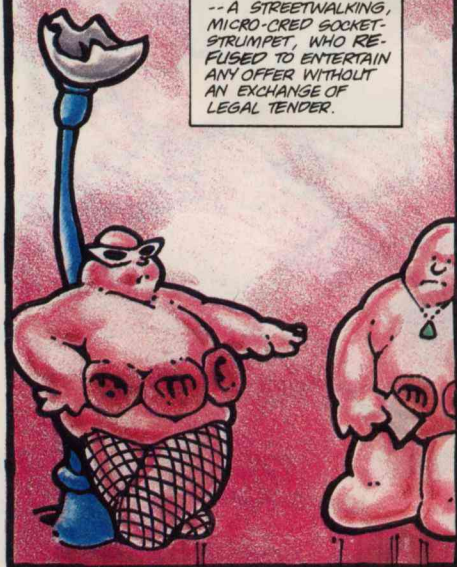
AND A TOUGH MACHO COP, WHO WAS GRACIOUSLY AT MY SERVICE.



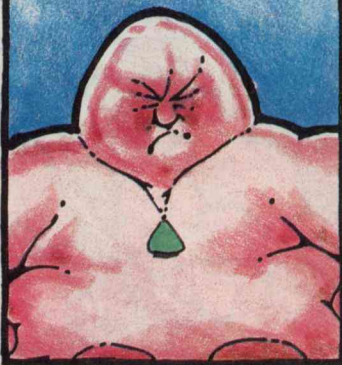
NUMBER SIX WAS A BIT OF A SURPRISE --



-- A STREETWALKING, MICRO-CRED SOCKET-STRUMPET, WHO REFUSED TO ENTERTAIN ANY OFFER WITHOUT AN EXCHANGE OF LEGAL TENDER.



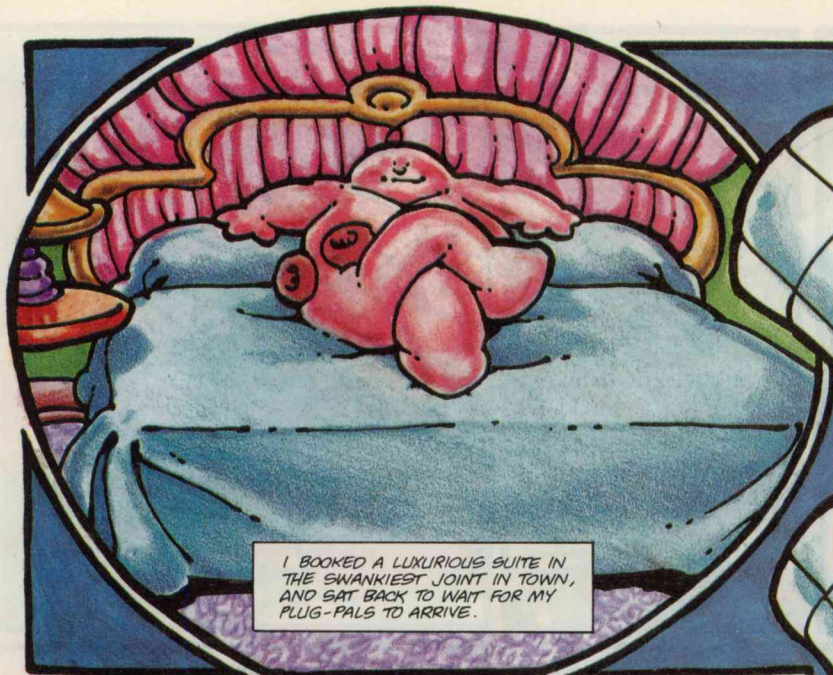
AFTER SOME CLEVER NEGOTIATING PLOYS ON MY PART, WE REACHED AN AMICABLE AGREEMENT.



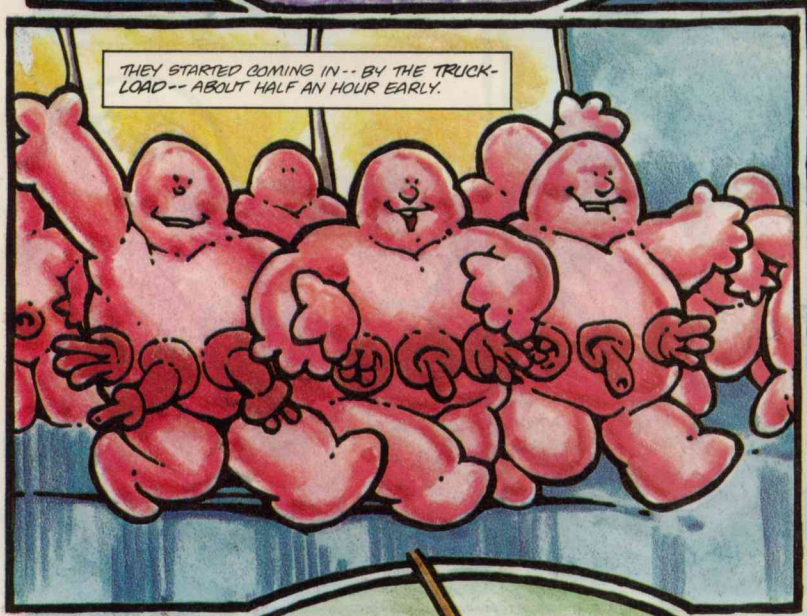
ALL ARRANGED. NOW CAME THE EASY PART -- SECURING THE NECESSARY SAMPLES OF LALALIAN JOINT JUICE....



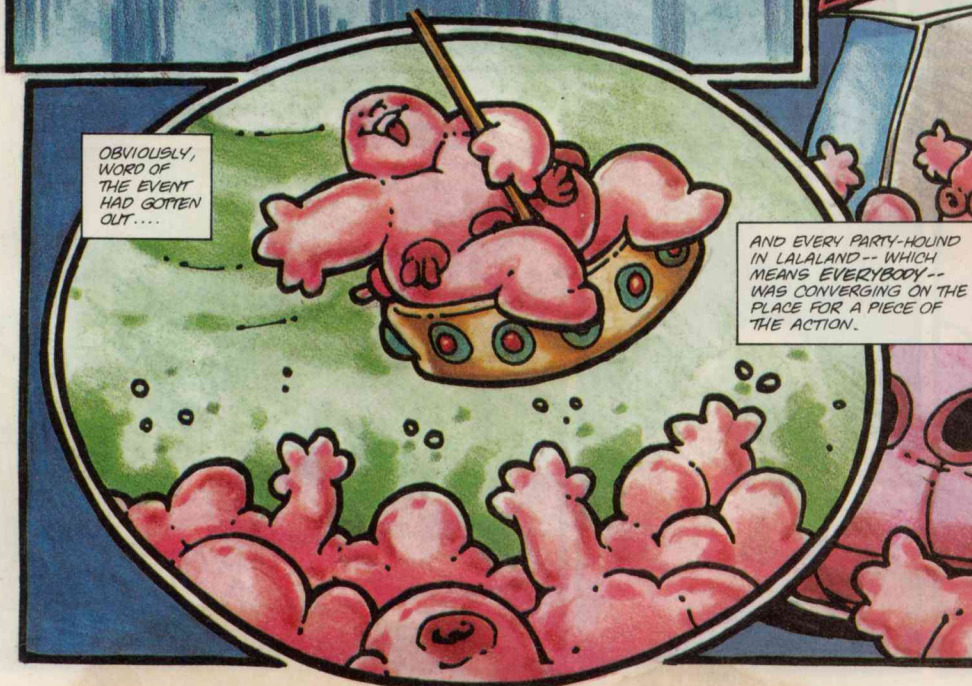




I BOOKED A LUXURIOUS SUITE IN THE SWANKIEST JOINT IN TOWN, AND SAT BACK TO WAIT FOR MY PLUG-PALS TO ARRIVE.



THEY STARTED COMING IN-- BY THE TRUCK-LOAD-- ABOUT HALF AN HOUR EARLY.

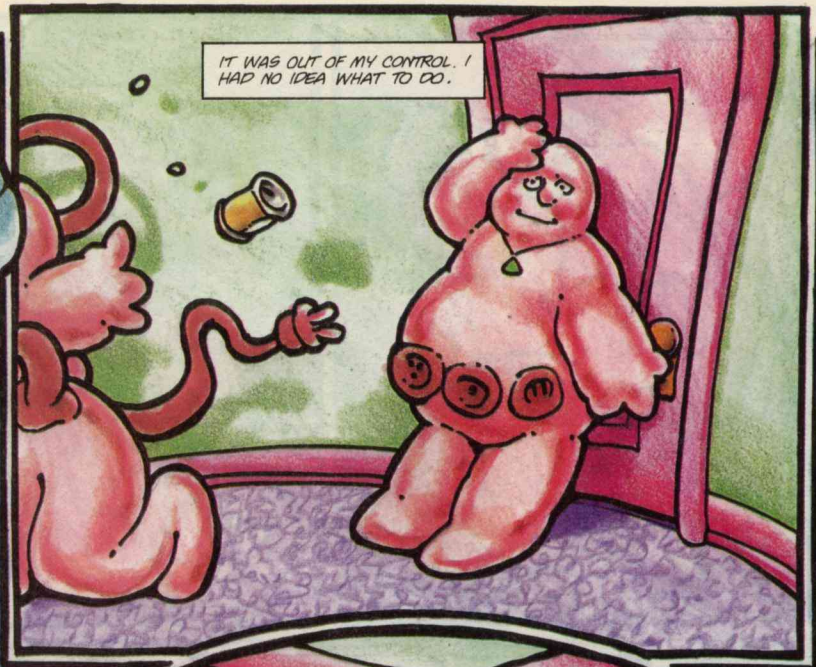


OBTUSIOLY, WORD OF THE EVENT HAD GOTTEN OUT....

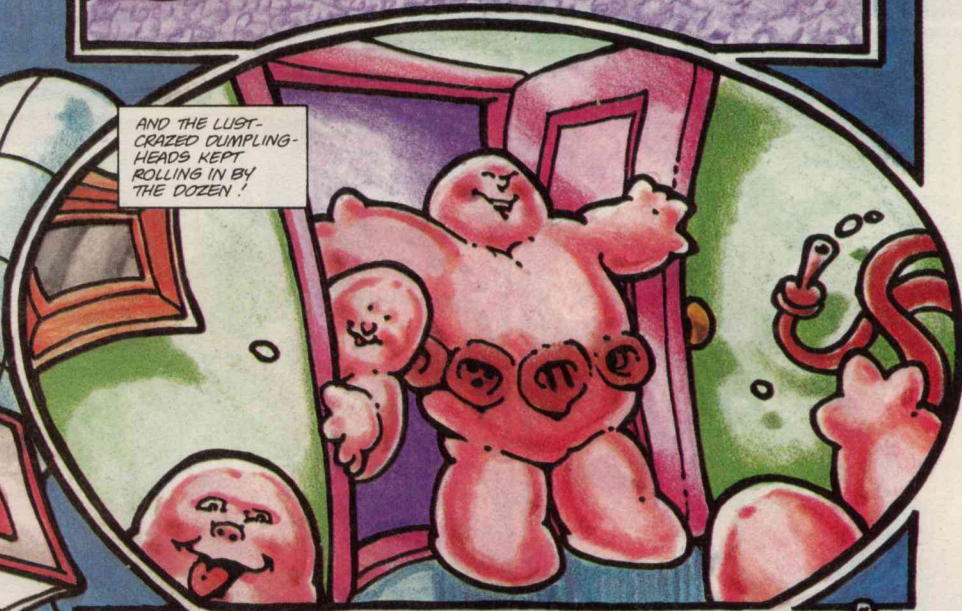
AND EVERY PARTY-HOUND IN LALALAND-- WHICH MEANS EVERYBODY-- WAS CONVERGING ON THE PLACE FOR A PIECE OF THE ACTION.

PLUG

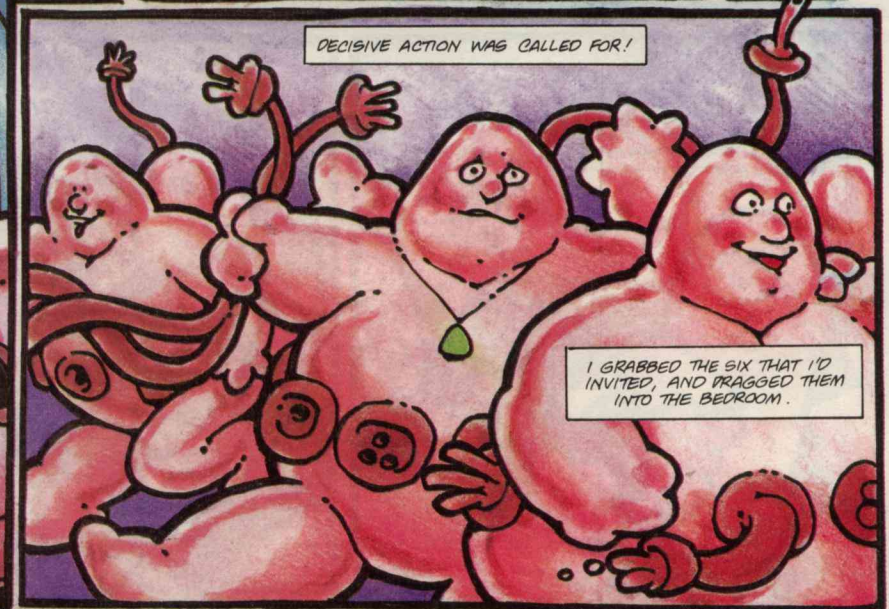




IT WAS OUT OF MY CONTROL. I  
HAD NO IDEA WHAT TO DO.



AND THE LUST-  
CRAZED DUMPLING-  
HEADS KEPT  
ROLLING IN BY  
THE DOZEN!

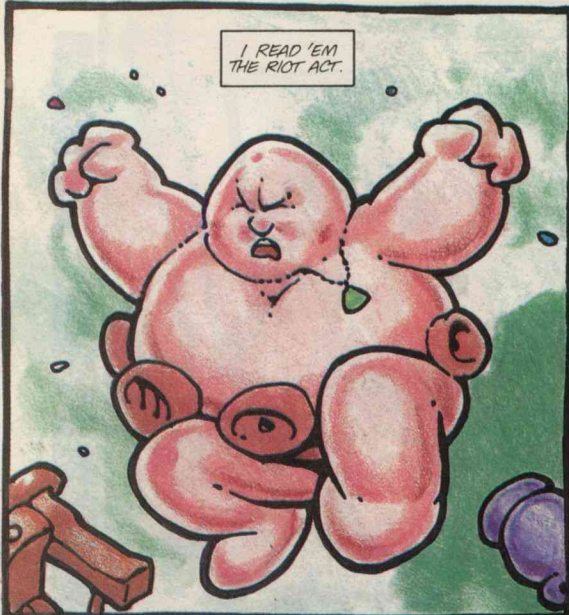


DECISIVE ACTION WAS CALLED FOR!

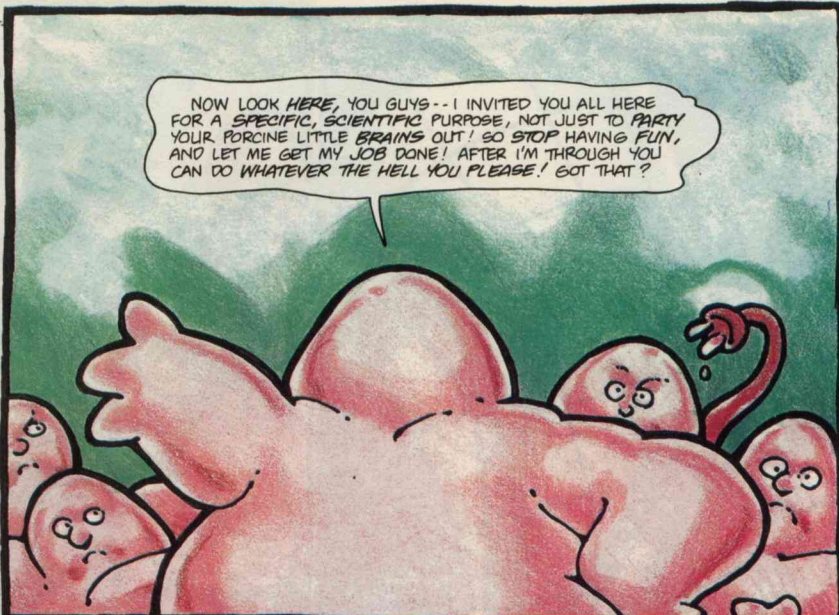
I GRABBED THE SIX THAT I'D  
INVITED, AND DRAGGED THEM  
INTO THE BEDROOM.



I READ 'EM  
THE RIOT ACT.

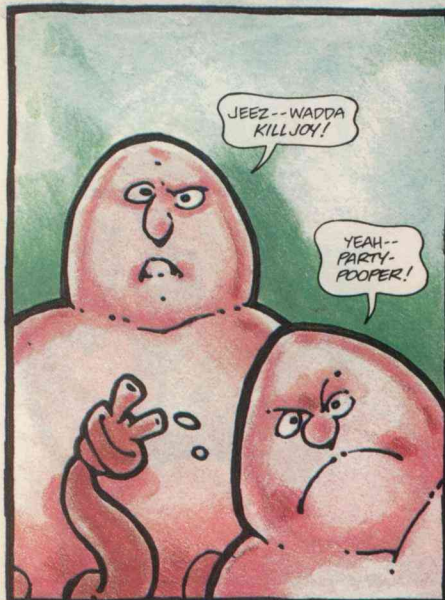


NOW LOOK HERE, YOU GUYS-- I INVITED YOU ALL HERE  
FOR A SPECIFIC, SCIENTIFIC PURPOSE, NOT JUST TO PARTY  
YOUR PORCINE LITTLE BRAINS OUT! SO STOP HAVING FUN,  
AND LET ME GET MY JOB DONE! AFTER I'M THROUGH YOU  
CAN DO WHATEVER THE HELL YOU PLEASE! GOT THAT?



JEEZ--WADDA  
KILLJOY!

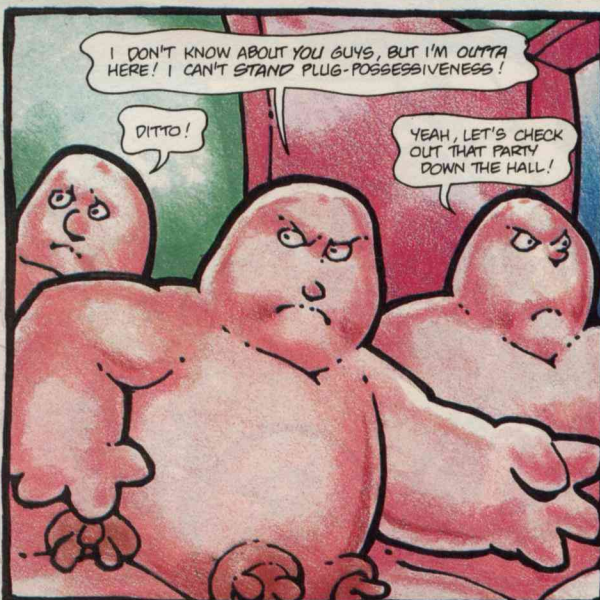
YEAH--  
PARTY-  
POOPER!



I DON'T KNOW ABOUT YOU GUYS, BUT I'M OUTTA  
HERE! I CAN'T STAND PLUG-POSSESSIVENESS!

DITTO!

YEAH, LET'S CHECK  
OUT THAT PARTY  
DOWN THE HALL!



HOLD IT FELLAHS!  
CHECK THIS OUT--  
LOOKS PROMISING!

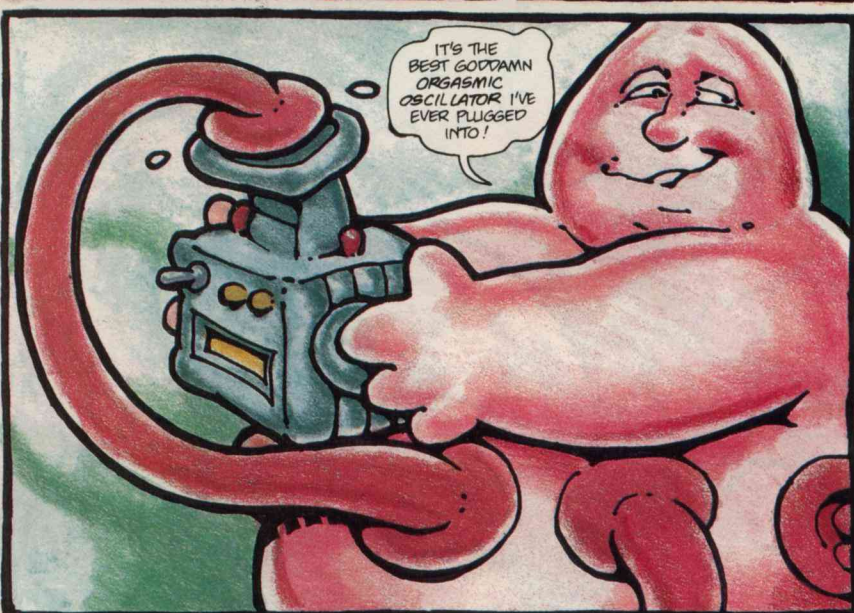


WHY, ER, THAT'S THE  
TRANSFORMER FOR MY  
ELECTRIC TOOTHBRUSH!

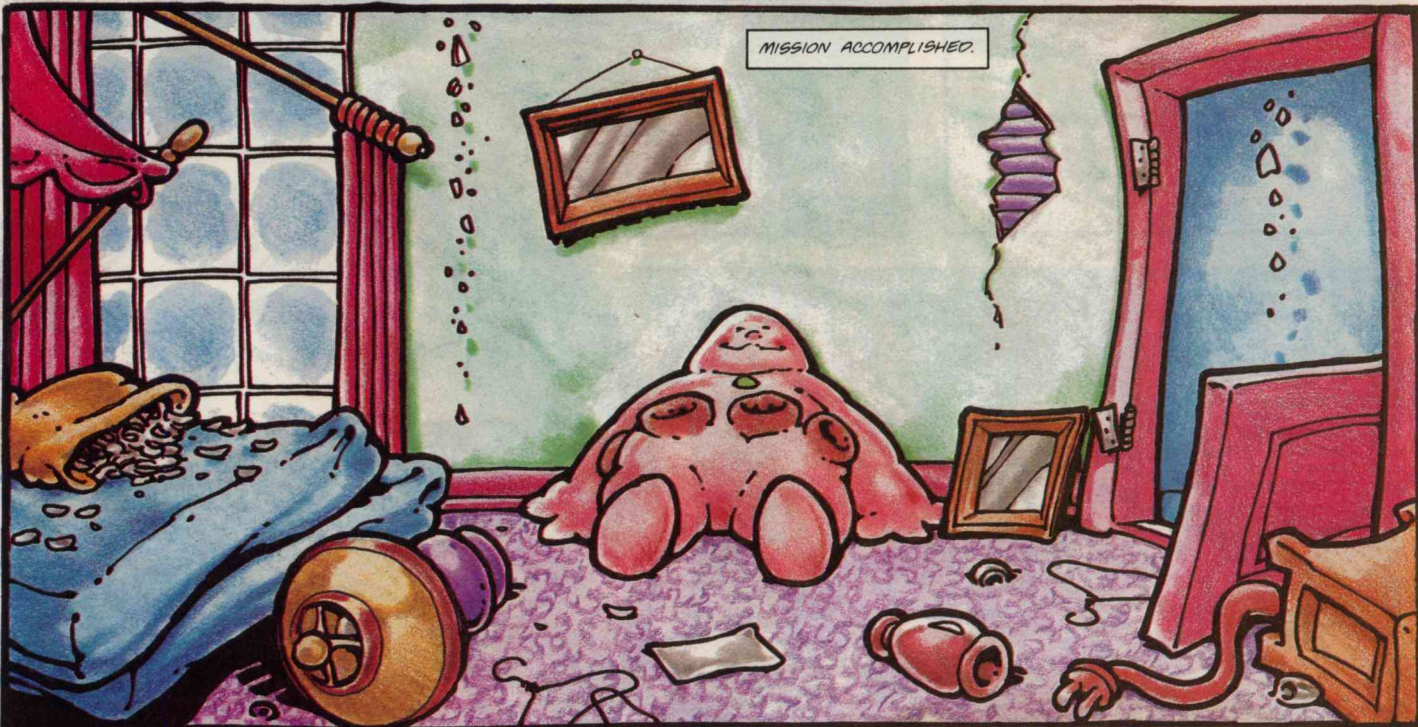
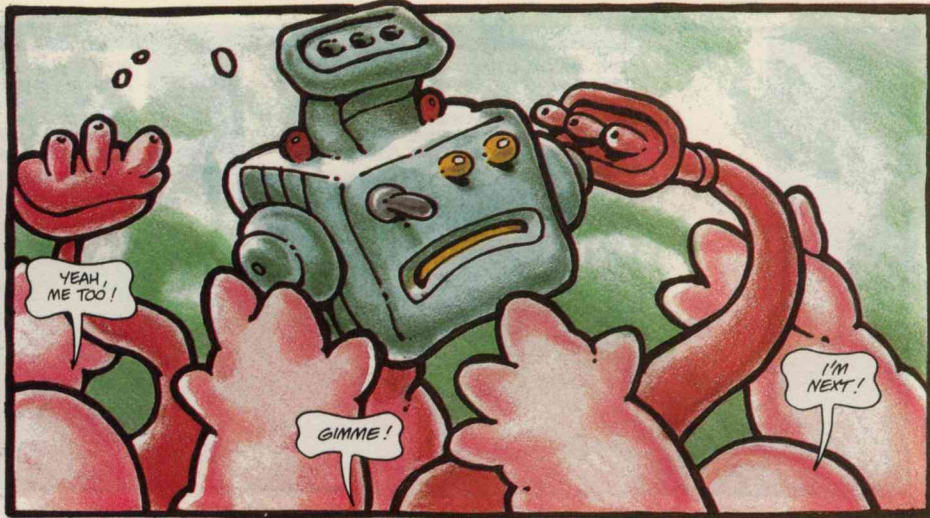
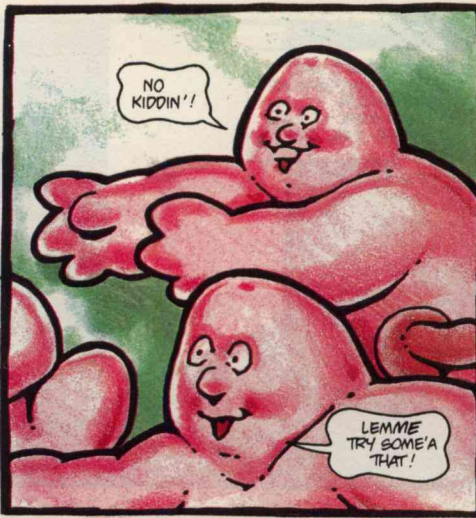
TOOTHBRUSH,  
HELL!



IT'S THE  
BEST GODDAMN  
ORGASMIC  
OSCILLATOR I'VE  
EVER PLUGGED  
INTO!









YEAH, SO LALALAND-- THE PLANET OF THE PERPETUAL PLUS PARTY--TURNED OUT TO BE KINDA FLIN. SO WHAT. I WAS STILL GLAD TO BE BACK HOME, AND DAMN GLAD TO BE BACK IN MY NORMAL FORM. I MEAN, THIS OLD BODY NOW FELT POSITIVELY ANOREXIC!

BUT I WAS ALSO EXHAUSTED, AND WITH ALL THE CHANGING I HAD AHEAD OF ME-- I STILL DIDN'T KNOW EXACTLY HOW MANY-- I KNEW I WAS GONNA BE WIPED OUT BY THE TIME THIS JOB WAS DONE.

SOMETHING TOLD ME I WAS REALLY GONNA NEED COCA-FARBEN'S LIFE-PROLONGING CONCOCTION WHEN ALL THIS WAS THROUGH.


RIGHT.

IF ONLY I KNEW THEN.... BUT I DIDN'T, DID I?

SO, IN MY BLISSFUL IGNORANCE, I TELE- FAXED A BRIEF REPORT ON MY LALA- LAND ADVENTURES TO THE DIRECTOR-- THE LESS I HAD TO DEAL DIRECTLY WITH THAT CREEP THE BETTER-- AND MADE READY FOR MY NEXT TRANSFORMATION.

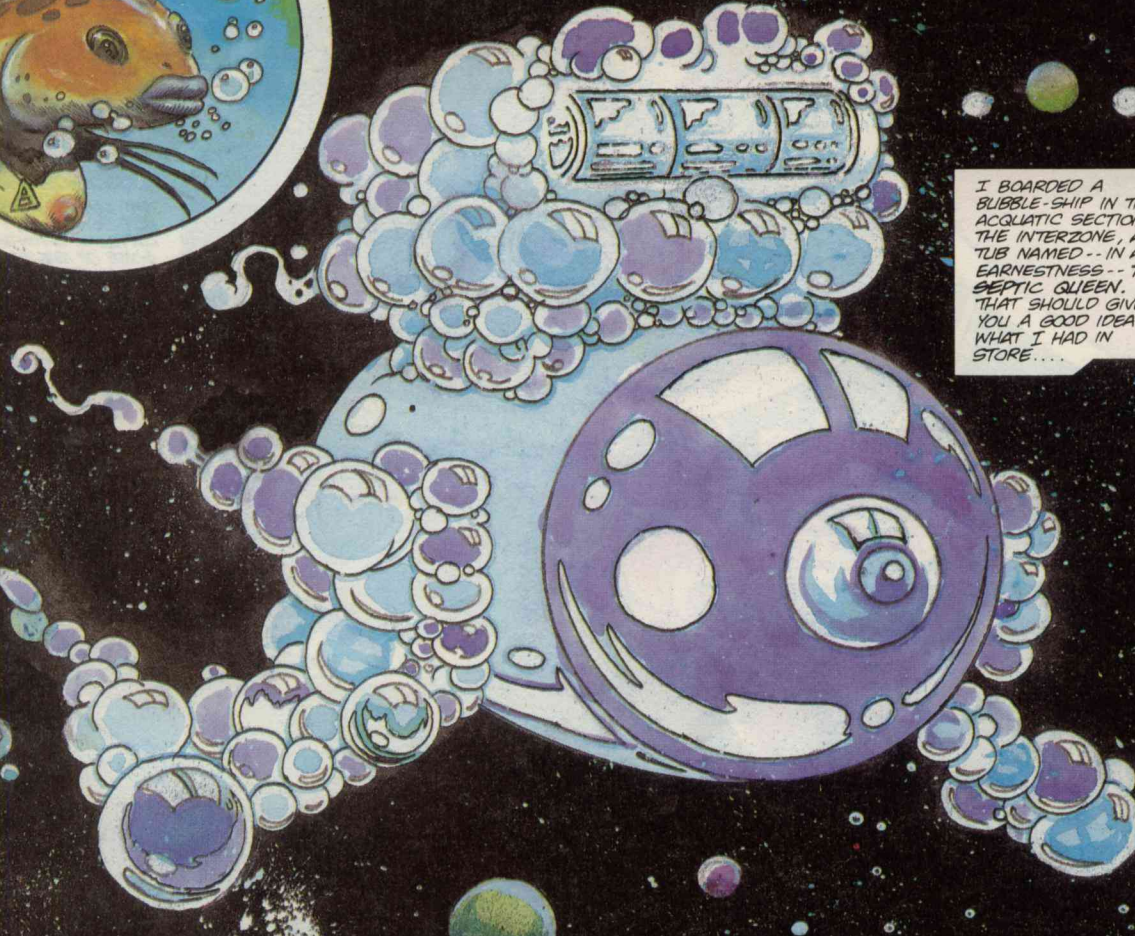
THIS TIME I BLACKED OUT-- THAT HAPPENS SOMETIMES-- BUT NOT BEFORE I SAW THE SCALES FORMING ON MY LEGS...





...AND WOKE UP A  
GODDAMN FISH.

WHICH WASN'T THE WORST OF IT,  
NOT BY A LONG SHOT. IT WAS THE  
KIND OF FISH I WAS WHICH WAS  
THE PROBLEM....



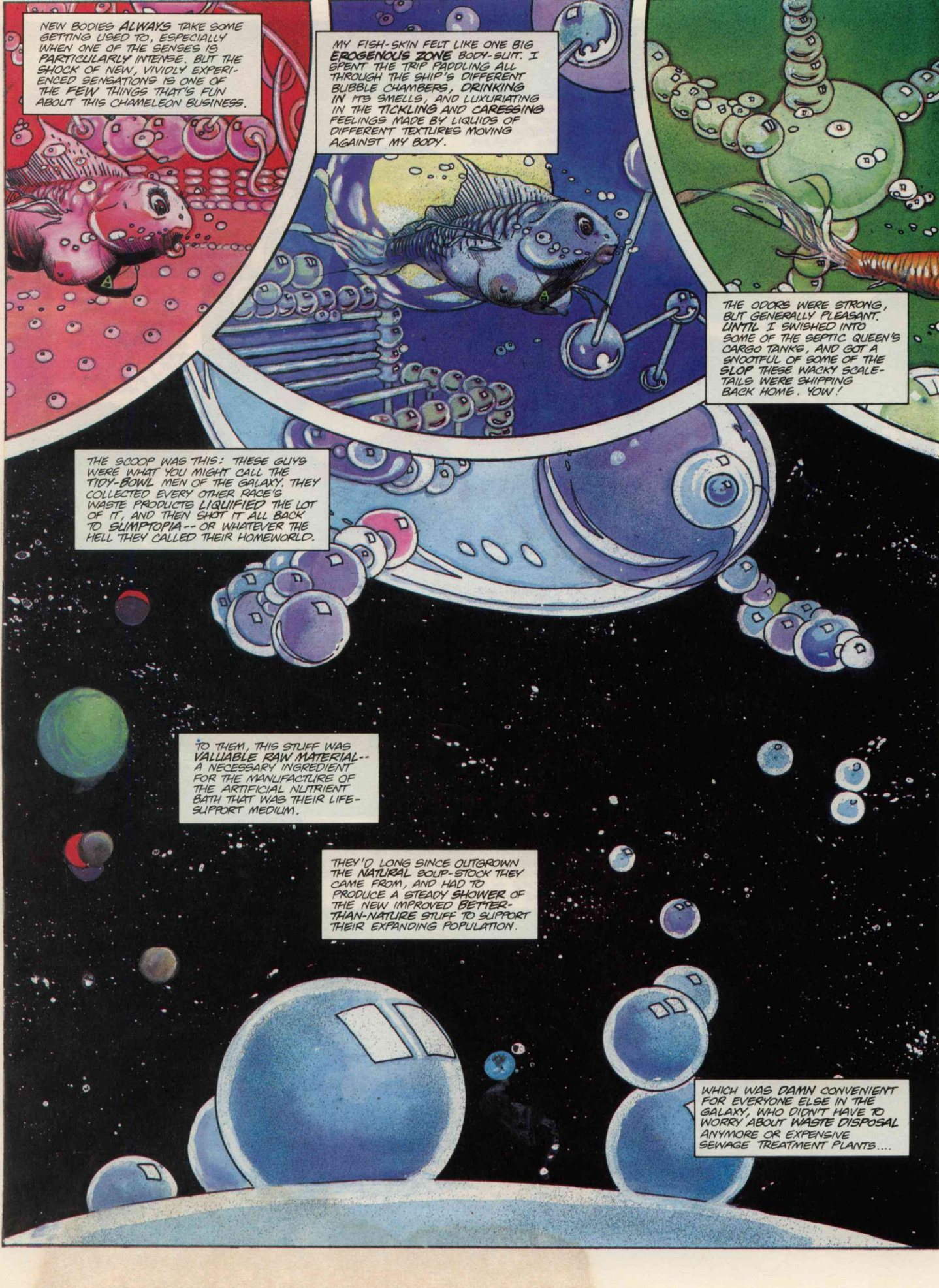
I BOARDED A  
BUBBLE-SHIP IN THE  
AQUATIC SECTION OF  
THE INTERZONE, A  
TUB NAMED -- IN ALL  
EARNESTNESS -- THE  
SEPTIC QUEEN.  
THAT SHOULD GIVE  
YOU A GOOD IDEA OF  
WHAT I HAD IN  
STORE....

WE WERE HEADED FOR A LIQUID-COVERED PLANET  
THAT HAS NO PROPER VERBAL NAME, SINCE THE  
REPTILIAN INHABITANTS COMMUNICATE NOT BY  
SPEECH BUT SMELL. THEY'VE GOT AN EXTREMELY  
SENSITIVE OLFACTORY SYSTEM, AND A COMPLEX,  
ODOR-PRODUCING GLANDULAR SYSTEM -- BOTH  
LOCATED IN THE SKIN COVERING THEIR ENTIRE  
BODY.

TRAVELERS THAT DO SPEAK HAVE  
LOTS OF IMPROPER NAMES FOR  
THE PLACE -- LIKE THE STINKHOLE,  
OR NOSE HEAVEN, DEPENDING ON  
THEIR PROCLINITIES.

THE LOCALS HAVE QUITE A NICE STENCH  
FOR IT, SORTA WARM AND NOSTALGIC.  
IT'S HARD TO DESCRIBE, BUT IT'S LIKE  
A MIXTURE OF OILED WOOD, SOFT  
LEATHER, AND MOM'S HOME COOKING.





NEW BODIES ALWAYS TAKE SOME GETTING USED TO, ESPECIALLY WHEN ONE OF THE SENSES IS PARTICULARLY INTENSE. BUT THE SHOCK OF NEW, VIVIDLY EXPERIENCED SENSATIONS IS ONE OF THE FEW THINGS THAT'S FUN ABOUT THIS CHAMELEON BUSINESS.

MY FISH-SKIN FELT LIKE ONE BIG EROGENOUS ZONE BODY-SUIT. I SPENT THE TRIP PADDLING ALL THROUGH THE SHIP'S DIFFERENT BUBBLE CHAMBERS, DRINKING IN ITS SMELLS, AND LUXURIATING IN THE TICKLING AND CARESSING FEELINGS MADE BY LIQUIDS OF DIFFERENT TEXTURES MOVING AGAINST MY BODY.

THE ODORS WERE STRONG, BUT GENERALLY PLEASANT. UNTIL I SWISHED INTO SOME OF THE SEPTIC QUEEN'S CARGO TANKS, AND GOT A SNOOTFUL OF SOME OF THE SLOP THESE WACKY SCALE-TAILS WERE SHIPPING BACK HOME. YOW!

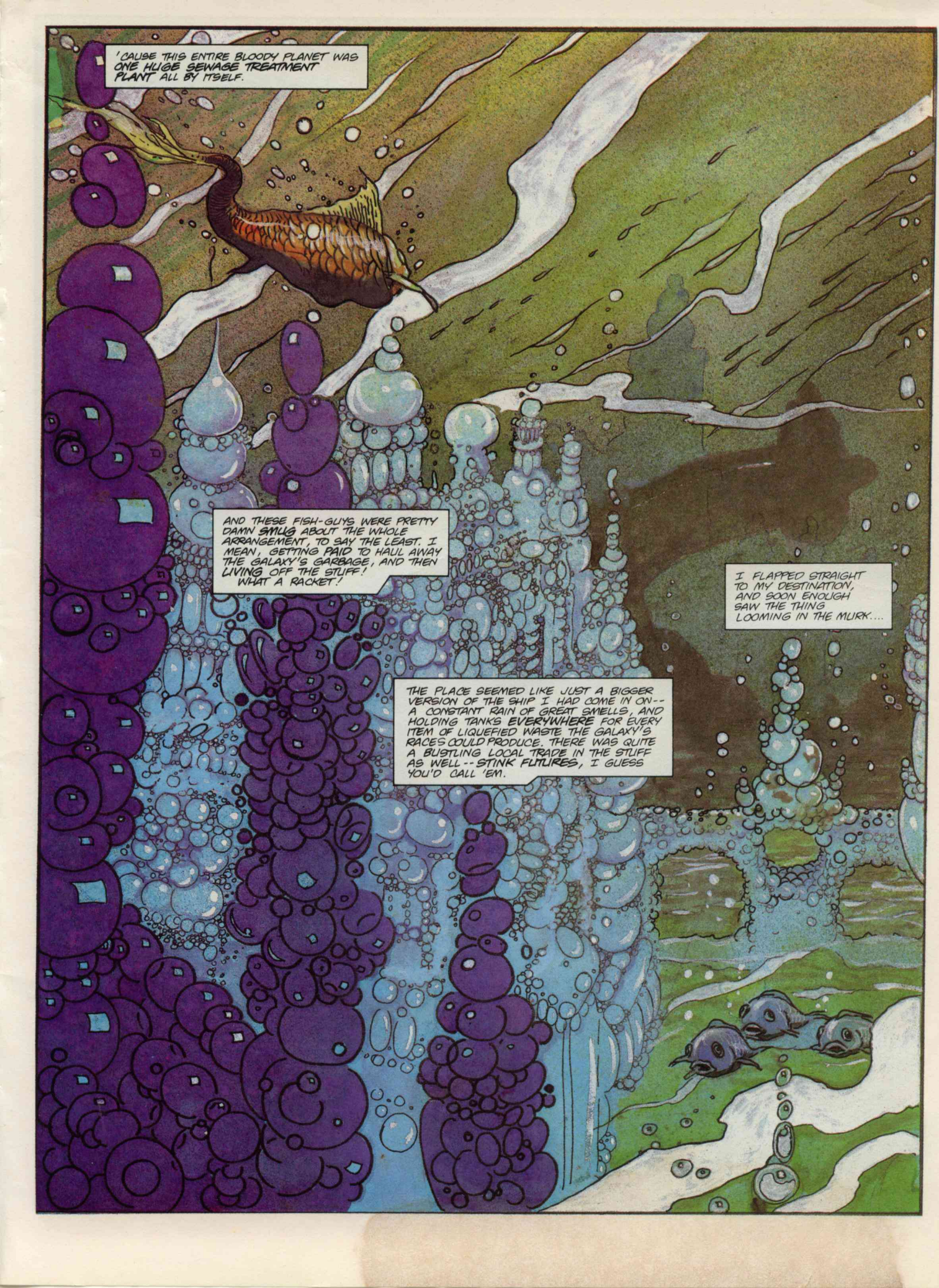
THE SCOOP WAS THIS: THESE GUYS WERE WHAT YOU MIGHT CALL THE TIDY-BOWL MEN OF THE GALAXY. THEY COLLECTED EVERY OTHER RACE'S WASTE PRODUCTS LIQUIFIED THE LOT OF IT, AND THEN SHOT IT ALL BACK TO SLUMPTOPIA-- OR WHATEVER THE HELL THEY CALLED THEIR HOMEWORLD.

TO THEM, THIS STUFF WAS VALUABLE RAW MATERIAL-- A NECESSARY INGREDIENT FOR THE MANUFACTURE OF THE ARTIFICIAL NUTRIENT BATH THAT WAS THEIR LIFE-SUPPORT MEDIUM.

THEY'D LONG SINCE OUTGROWN THE NATURAL SOUP-STOCK THEY CAME FROM, AND HAD TO PRODUCE A STEADY SHOWER OF THE NEW IMPROVED BETTER-THAN-NATURE STUFF TO SUPPORT THEIR EXPANDING POPULATION.

WHICH WAS DAMN CONVENIENT FOR EVERYONE ELSE IN THE GALAXY, WHO DIDN'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT WASTE DISPOSAL ANYMORE OR EXPENSIVE SEWAGE TREATMENT PLANTS....





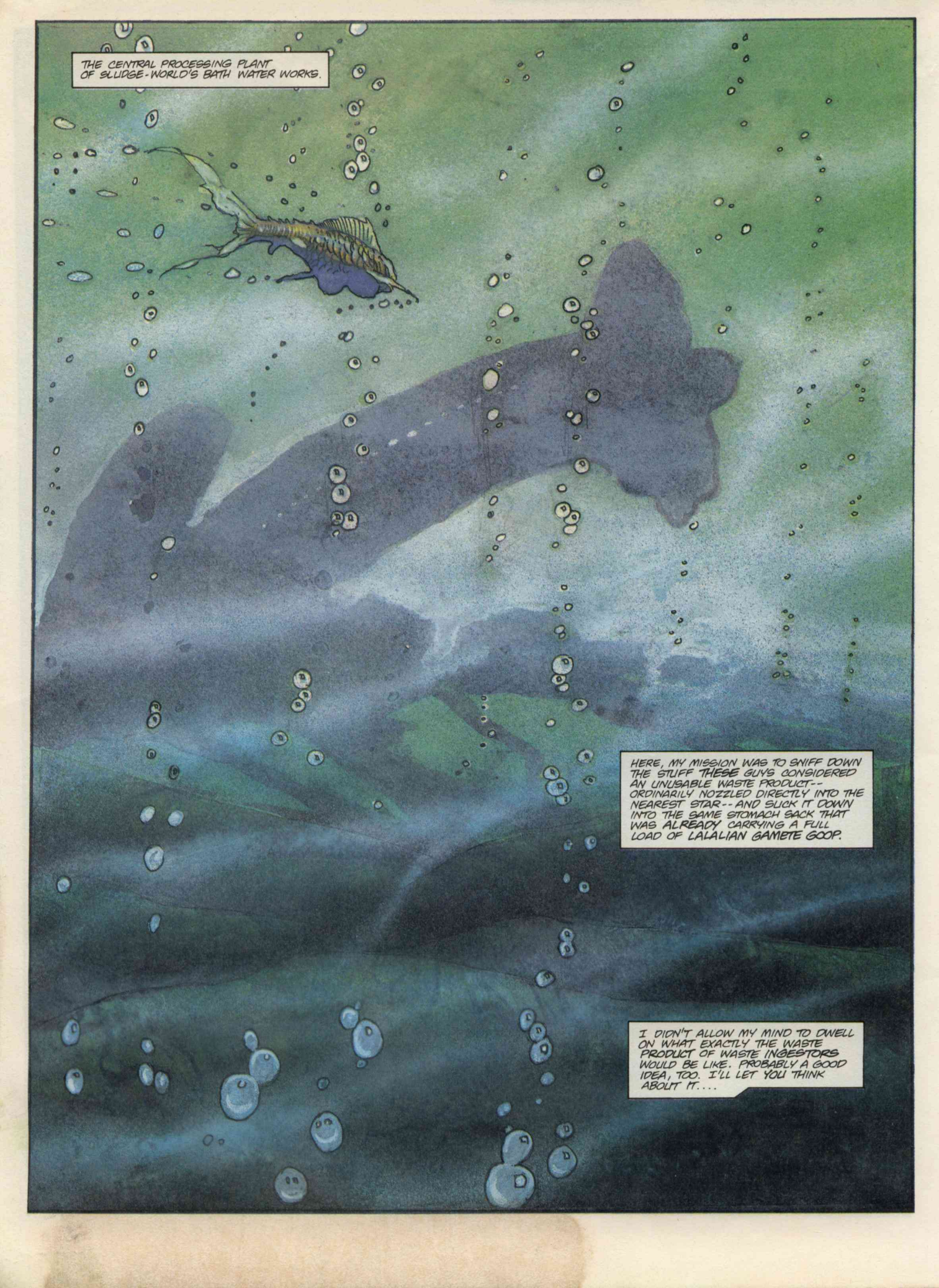
'CAUSE THIS ENTIRE BLOODY PLANET WAS  
ONE HUGE SEWAGE TREATMENT  
PLANT ALL BY ITSELF.

AND THESE FISH-GUYS WERE PRETTY  
DAMN SMUG ABOUT THE WHOLE  
ARRANGEMENT, TO SAY THE LEAST. I  
MEAN, GETTING PAID TO HAUL AWAY  
THE GALAXY'S GARBAGE, AND THEN  
LIVING OFF THE STUFF!  
WHAT A RACKET!

I FLAPPED STRAIGHT  
TO MY DESTINATION,  
AND SOON ENOUGH  
SAW THE THING  
LOOMING IN THE MURK....

THE PLACE SEEMED LIKE JUST A BIGGER  
VERSION OF THE SHIP I HAD COME IN ON--  
A CONSTANT RAIN OF GREAT SMELLS, AND  
HOLDING TANKS EVERYWHERE FOR EVERY  
ITEM OF LIQUEFIED WASTE THE GALAXY'S  
RACES COULD PRODUCE. THERE WAS QUITE  
A BUSTLING LOCAL TRADE IN THE STUFF  
AS WELL--STINK FUTURES, I GUESS  
YOU'D CALL 'EM.



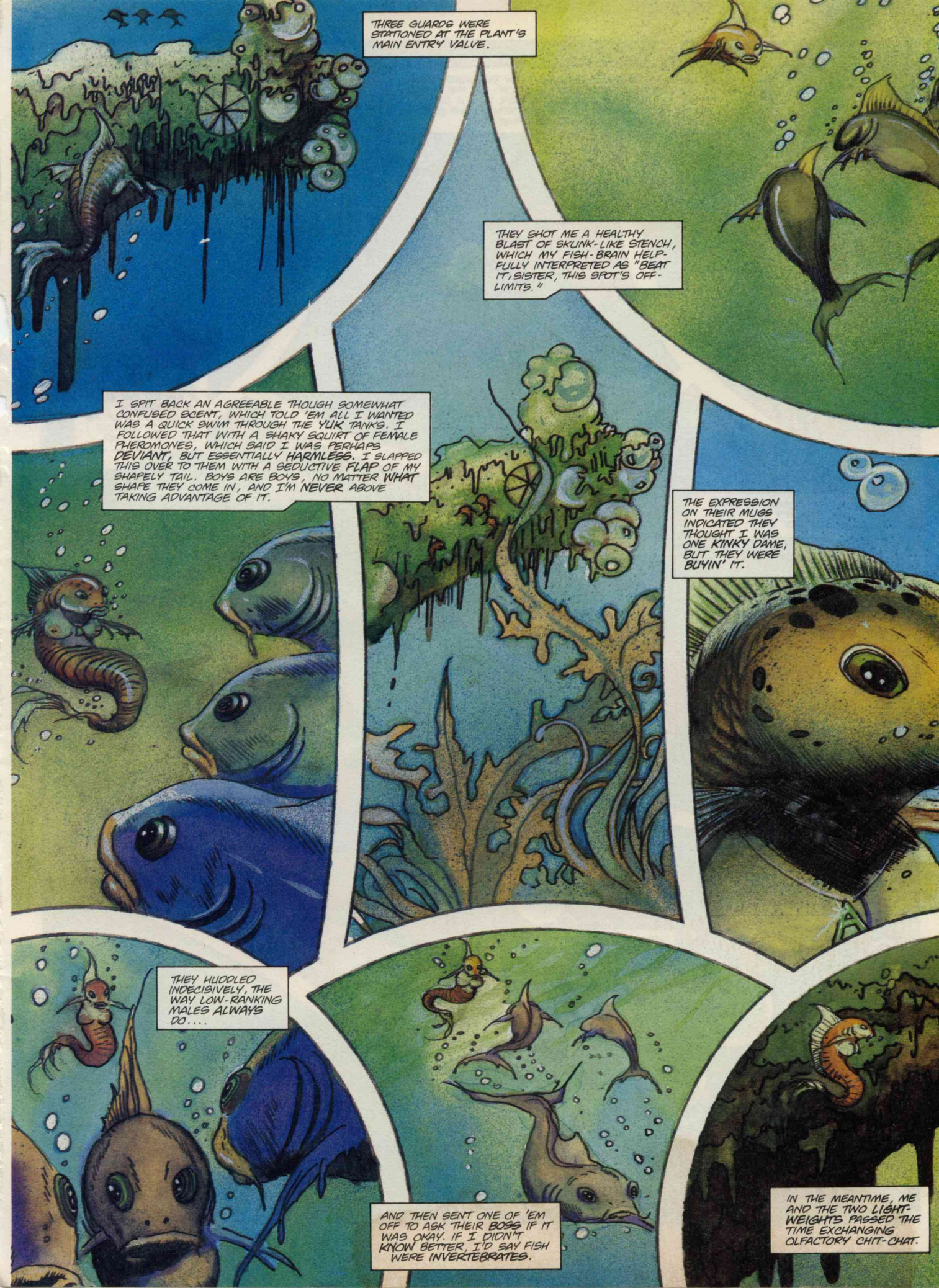


THE CENTRAL PROCESSING PLANT  
OF SLUDGE-WORLD'S BATH WATER WORKS.

HERE, MY MISSION WAS TO SNIFF DOWN  
THE STUFF THESE GUYS CONSIDERED  
AN UNUSABLE WASTE PRODUCT--  
ORDINARILY NOZZLED DIRECTLY INTO THE  
NEAREST STAR-- AND SUCK IT DOWN  
INTO THE SAME STOMACH SACK THAT  
WAS ALREADY CARRYING A FULL  
LOAD OF LALALIAN GAMETE GOOP.

I DIDN'T ALLOW MY MIND TO DWELL  
ON WHAT EXACTLY THE WASTE  
PRODUCT OF WASTE INGESTORS  
WOULD BE LIKE. PROBABLY A GOOD  
IDEA, TOO. I'LL LET YOU THINK  
ABOUT IT....



A comic book page featuring several panels of fish characters in an underwater setting. The panels are separated by white borders. The fish have various colors and shapes, some resembling real fish and others more fantastical. There are bubbles and seaweed in the background of the panels. The text is in a simple, sans-serif font, typical of comic book dialogue boxes.

THREE GUARDS WERE  
STATIONED AT THE PLANT'S  
MAIN ENTRY VALVE.

THEY SHOT ME A HEALTHY  
BLAST OF SKUNK-LIKE STENCH,  
WHICH MY FISH-BRAIN HELP-  
FULLY INTERPRETED AS "BEAT  
IT, SISTER, THIS SPOT'S OFF-  
LIMITS."

I SPIT BACK AN AGREEABLE THOUGH SOMEWHAT  
CONFUSED SCENT, WHICH TOLD 'EM ALL I WANTED  
WAS A QUICK SWIM THROUGH THE YUK TANKS. I  
FOLLOWED THAT WITH A SHAKY SQUIRT OF FEMALE  
PHEROMONES, WHICH SAID I WAS PERHAPS  
DEVIANT, BUT ESSENTIALLY HARMLESS. I SLAPPED  
THIS OVER TO THEM WITH A SEDUCTIVE FLAP OF MY  
SHAPELY TAIL. BOYS ARE BOYS, NO MATTER WHAT  
SHAPE THEY COME IN, AND I'M NEVER ABOVE  
TAKING ADVANTAGE OF IT.


THE EXPRESSION  
ON THEIR MUSS  
INDICATED THEY  
THOUGHT I WAS  
ONE KINKY DAME,  
BUT THEY WERE  
BUYIN' IT.

THEY HUDDLED  
INDECISIVELY, THE  
WAY LOW-RANKING  
MALES ALWAYS  
DO....

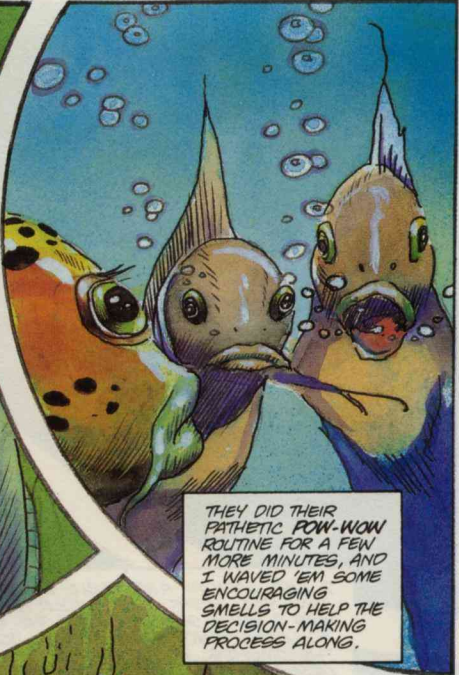
AND THEN SENT ONE OF 'EM  
OFF TO ASK THEIR BOSS IF IT  
WAS OKAY. IF I DIDN'T  
KNOW BETTER, I'D SAY FISH  
WERE INVERTEBRATES.

IN THE MEANTIME, ME  
AND THE TWO LIGHT-  
WEIGHTS PASSED THE  
TIME EXCHANGING  
OLFACTORY CHIT-CHAT.

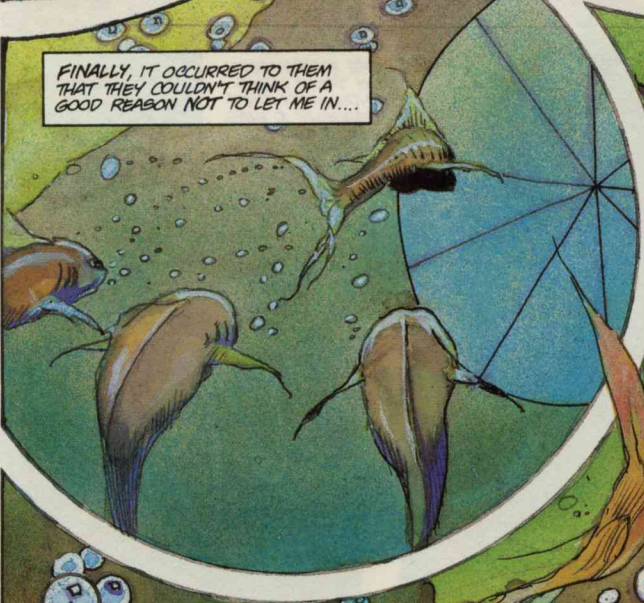




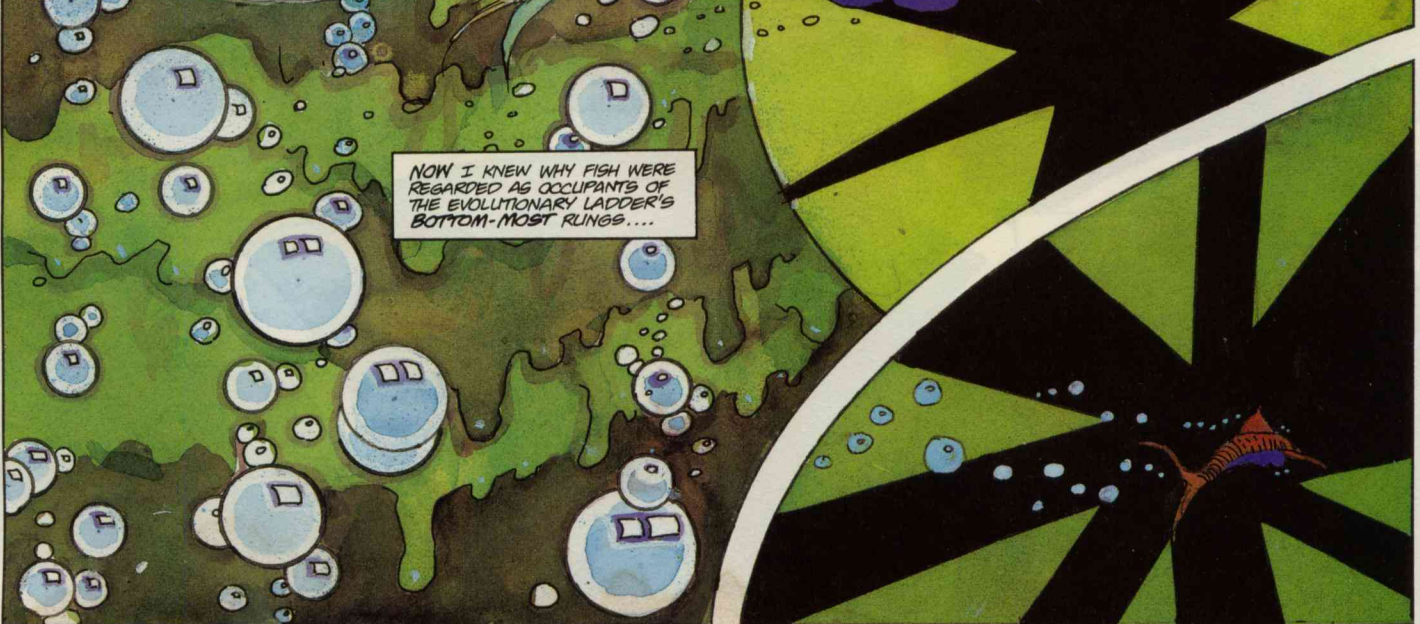
MESSENGER-BOY CAME BACK WITH THE WORD FROM AN EQUALLY SPINELESS SUPERIOR--TO THE EFFECT OF, "SURE, LET THE EGG-LAYER TAKE A DIP IN THE POO-POO POOL, BUT IF ANYTHING GOES WRONG, IT'S ON YOUR DORSALS, NOT MINE!"



THEY DID THEIR PATHETIC POW-WOW ROUTINE FOR A FEW MORE MINUTES, AND I WAVED 'EM SOME ENCOURAGING SMELLS TO HELP THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS ALONG.




FINALLY, IT OCCURRED TO THEM THAT THEY COULDN'T THINK OF A GOOD REASON NOT TO LET ME IN....




NOW I KNEW WHY FISH WERE REGARDED AS OCCUPANTS OF THE EVOLUTIONARY LADDER'S BOTTOM-MOST RUNGS....

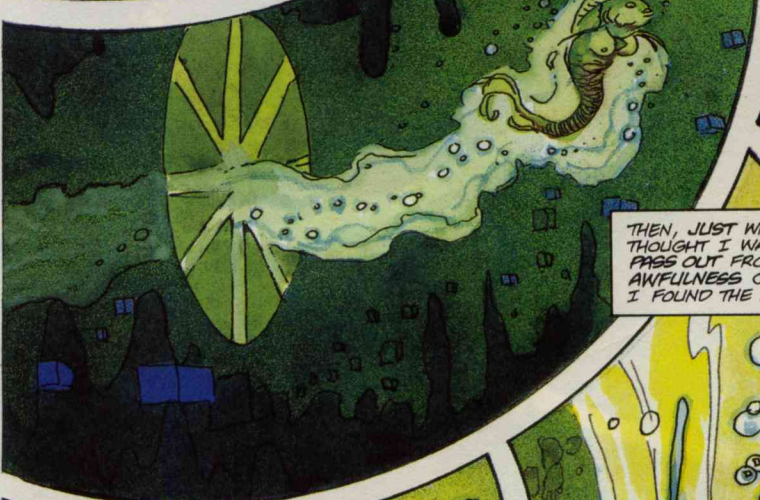




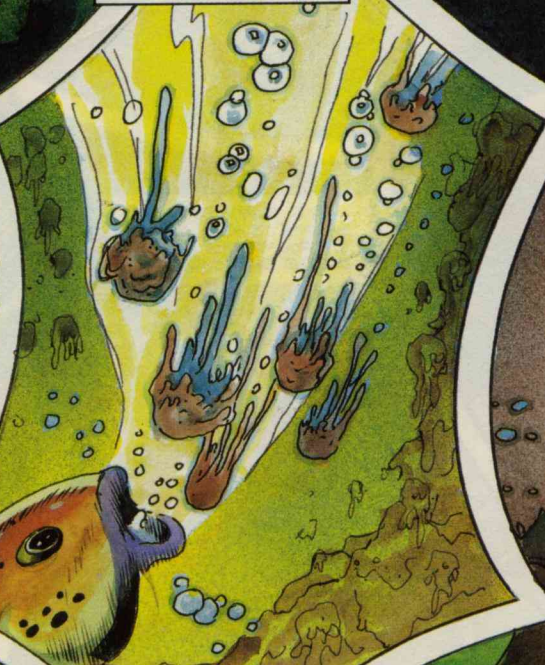

THE SCAVENGER  
HUNT WAS ON....




I WENT FROM CHAMBER TO  
CHAMBER, DEEPER INTO THIS  
DUMP'S MURKY DEPTHS. THE  
STINK GOT WORSE AND  
WORSE, BUT IT STILL WASN'T  
THE JUNK I NEEDED.  
MUSTARD GAS HAD NOTHING  
ON THIS STUFF.



THEN, JUST WHEN I  
THOUGHT I WAS GONNA  
PASS OUT FROM THE  
AWFULNESS OF IT ALL,  
I FOUND THE RIGHT ONE.

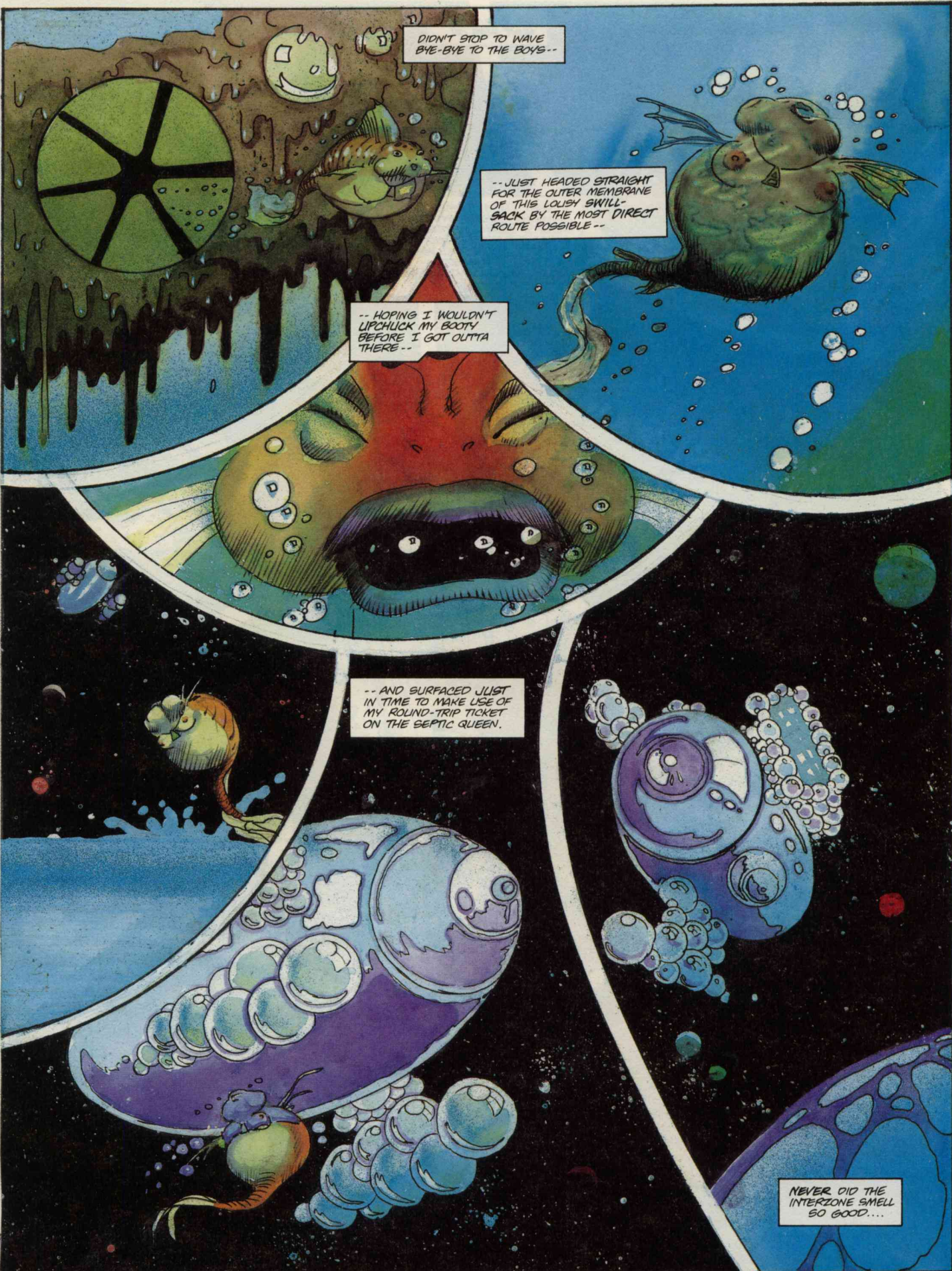


SMELLING IT WAS BAD  
ENOUGH. GOBBLING IT  
WAS FAR WORSE.



BUT GOBBLE IT  
I DID, AND THEN  
ZOOMED FOR  
THE EXIT.





DIDN'T STOP TO WAVE  
BYE-BYE TO THE BOYS--

-- JUST HEADED STRAIGHT  
FOR THE OUTER MEMBRANE  
OF THIS LOUSY SWILL-  
SACK BY THE MOST DIRECT  
ROUTE POSSIBLE --

-- HOPING I WOULDN'T  
UPCHUCK MY BOOTY  
BEFORE I GOT OUTTA  
THERE --

-- AND SURFACED JUST  
IN TIME TO MAKE USE OF  
MY ROUND-TRIP TICKET  
ON THE SEPTIC QUEEN.

NEVER DID THE  
INTERZONE SMELL  
SO GOOD....



TOO BAD I DIDN'T GET TIME TO ENJOY IT. WITHIN HOURS, I HAD DIGESTED THE NEXT BATCH OF BODY-SPECS ON MY TIME-RELEASE DATA-CHIP, AND TURNED INTO THIS CURVY, BIMBO-LOOKING BABE. BEAUTIFUL VACUITY IS SOMETIMES THE BEST DISGUISE-- NO ONE TAKES YOU SERIOUSLY ENOUGH TO FEEL THREATENED.



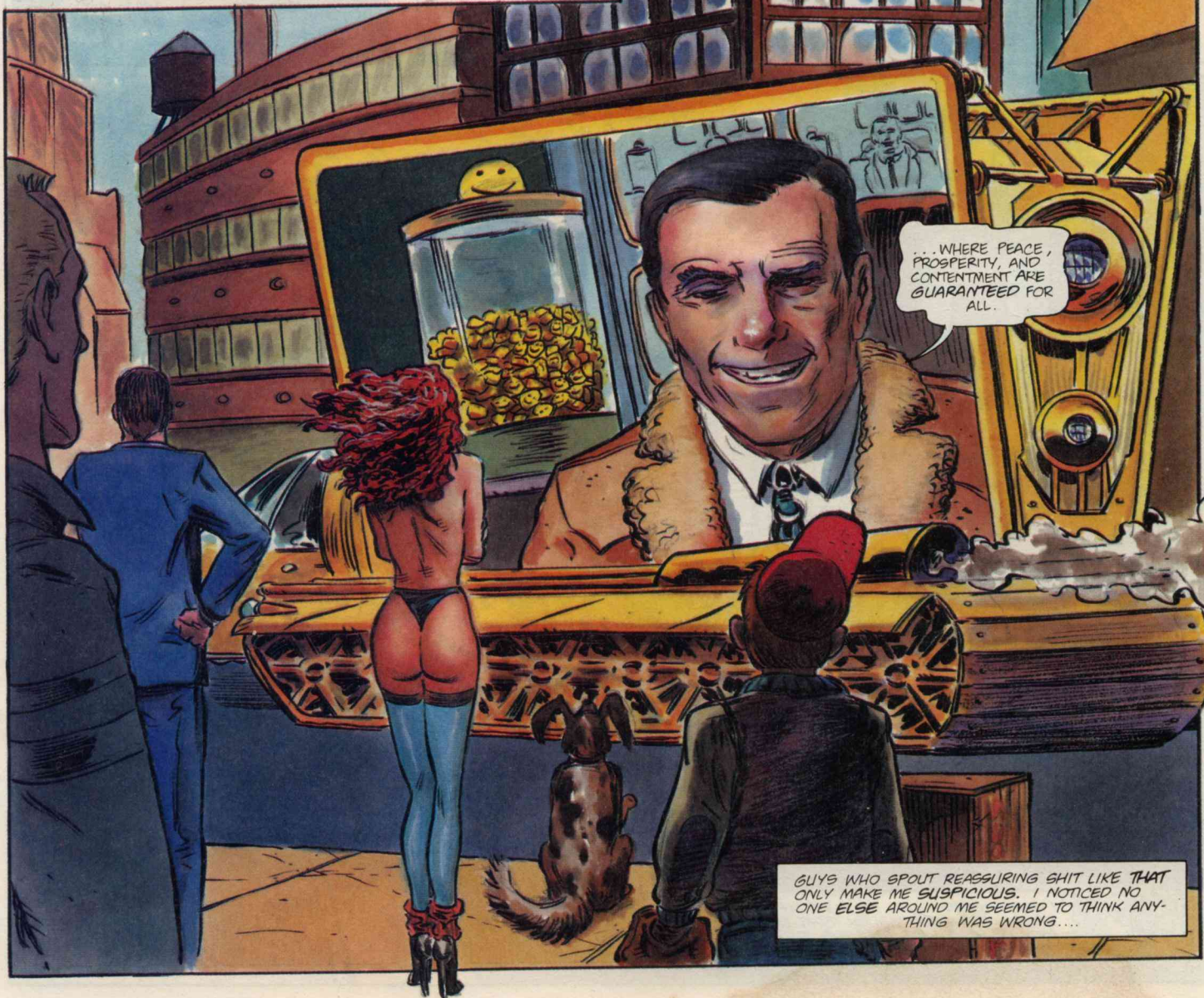
THE PLACE WAS HORRIBLY COZY, AND WE WERE ALL SUPPOSED TO BE ONE BIG, HAPPY FAMILY-- WITH LOVABLE, PROTECTIVE DAD TAKING CARE OF THINGS FOR US.



YES, MY FRIENDS, WE ARE TRULY ONE HAPPY WORLD...

HE CALLED HIMSELF THE BIG GUY, AND KEPT TELLING EVERYONE NOT TO WORRY ABOUT ANYTHING.

...WHERE PEACE, PROSPERITY, AND CONTENTMENT ARE GUARANTEED FOR ALL.

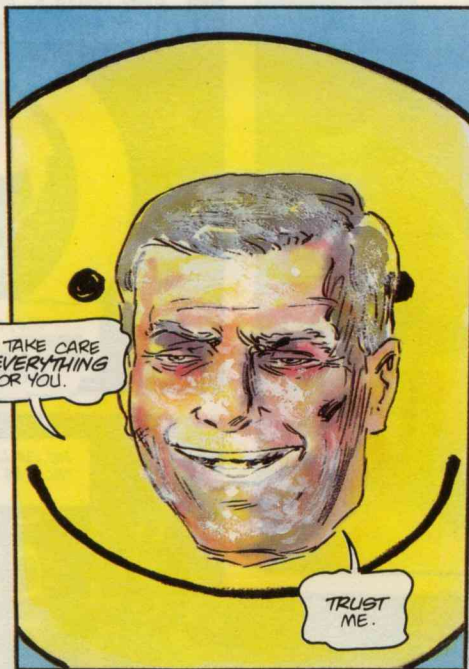


GUYS WHO SPOUT REASSURING SHIT LIKE THAT ONLY MAKE ME SUSPICIOUS. I NOTICED NO ONE ELSE AROUND ME SEEMED TO THINK ANYTHING WAS WRONG....



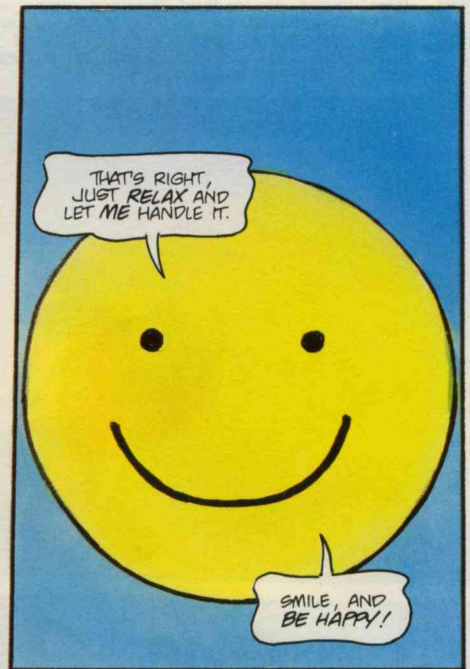


YES, MY FRIENDS, DON'T WORRY ABOUT ALL THE LITTLE DETAILS. JUST LEAVE THAT SILLY, BOTHERSOME STUFF TO ME.



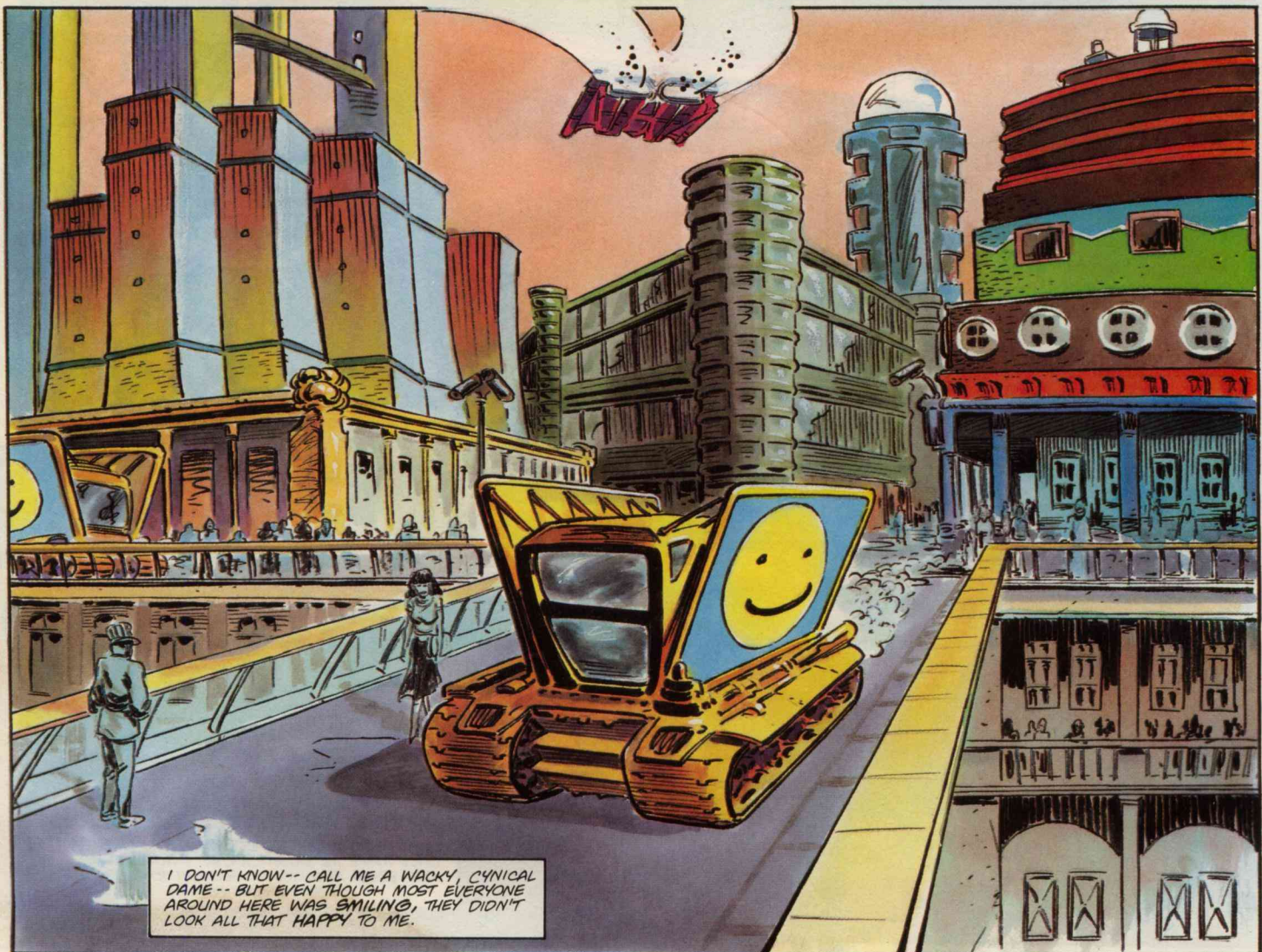
I'LL TAKE CARE OF EVERYTHING FOR YOU.

TRUST ME.



THAT'S RIGHT, JUST RELAX AND LET ME HANDLE IT.

SMILE, AND BE HAPPY!



I DON'T KNOW-- CALL ME A WACKY, CYNICAL DAME-- BUT EVEN THOUGH MOST EVERYONE AROUND HERE WAS SMILING, THEY DIDN'T LOOK ALL THAT HAPPY TO ME.





BLIT HEY, SCOOPING OUT THE TRUE FEELINGS OF THE LOCAL POPULACE WASN'T IN MY JOB DESCRIPTION THIS TIME OUT. I HAD MY OWN-- MORE PRESSING-- PROBLEMS TO WORRY ABOUT, LIKE SECURING THE SYNTHESIZED NEURO-CHEMICALS PRODUCED HERE ON HAPPYWORLD.

GET YOUR WONDER WAFERS! CAN'T BE HAPPY WITHOUT YOUR WONDER WAFERS!



READY FOR YOUR DOSES, LADIES? THEY'RE FACTORY FRESH!

I'll TAKE TWO, YOUNG MAN!

Hmmm... AM FEELING A BIT HUNGRY...



WONDER IF THIS BOMBSHELL BODY OF MINE HAS TO WATCH HER DIET-- HUH?

DON'T!



DO YOU REALIZE WHAT YOU'RE EATING? DON'T YOU KNOW THAT CRAP IS THE SOURCE OF ALL OUR PROBLEMS?

I BEG YOUR PARDON!



I'M REALLY SORRY I WAS SO RUDE TO YOU BACK THERE -- I GOT CARRIED AWAY, I GUESS. I JUST WANTED TO CATCH YOU BEFORE YOU ATE ANY OF THAT WONDER WAFER-- THEY'RE ADDICTIVE, YOU KNOW.

ADDICTIVE? BUT, I THOUGHT IT WAS JUST SOME KIND OF CANDY-- THE WAY THEY WERE SELLING IT ON THE STREET!

I PRESUMED FROM YOUR UNGLAZED EYES YOU WERE NEW AROUND HERE-- NOW I KNOW IT! DON'T YOU KNOW WHAT'S GOING ON?

NO, I'M FROM OFF-PLANET. JUST ARRIVED TODAY.

'EVENING FOWLER. NEW RECRUIT, OR JUST ANOTHER NEW GIRLFRIEND?

HMMMM, SOMETHING TELLS ME SUBVERSION'S IN THE AIR!

NEITHER, SMART GUY-- IT'S MY MOTHER, SO ZIP YOUR PANTS.

YOU COULD SAY THAT-- WE'RE JUST TRYING TO MAKE PEOPLE AWARE OF THE REALITY BEHIND THE BIG GUY'S BENEVOLENT MASK. THAT'S JACK ISIDORE SPEAKING NOW....

IT'S WONDER WAFERS THAT'RE THE OPIATE OF OUR PEOPLE--

--AND THEY'VE SAPPED US OF OUR WILL TO RESIST, OUR DESIRE FOR INDIVIDUAL THOUGHT AND ACTION, AND WE WILL CONTINUE TO BE THE MINDLESS SLAVES OF OUR SELF-APPOINTED LEADERS UNTIL WE BREAK EVERYONE OF THE WONDER WAFER HABIT!

JACK'S QUITE A RABBLE-ROUSER, eh?

UH, FOWLER, COULD WE GO SOMEWHERE QUIETER AND TALK?

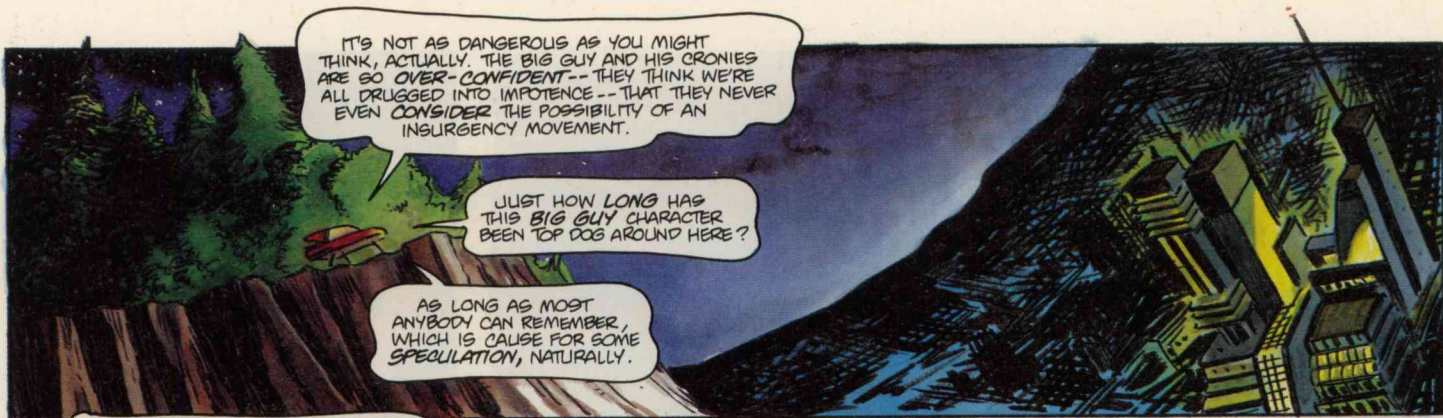
SURE, IF YOU LIKE....

SO WHAT KIND OF REVOLUTION ARE YOU AND YOUR FRIENDS TRYING TO PULL OFF, ANYWAY?

NOTHING TOO AMBITIOUS-- JUST THE TOTAL OVERTHROW OF THE PLANETARY GOVERNMENT, THAT'S ALL.

OH.

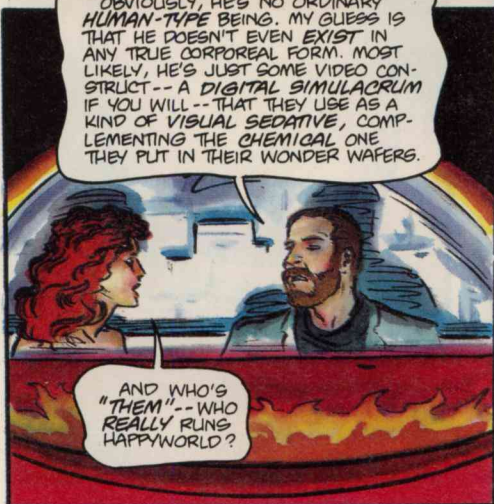




IT'S NOT AS DANGEROUS AS YOU MIGHT THINK, ACTUALLY. THE BIG GUY AND HIS CRONIES ARE SO OVER-CONFIDENT--THEY THINK WE'RE ALL DRUGGED INTO IMPOTENCE--THAT THEY NEVER EVEN CONSIDER THE POSSIBILITY OF AN INSURGENCY MOVEMENT.

JUST HOW LONG HAS THIS BIG GUY CHARACTER BEEN TOP DOG AROUND HERE?

AS LONG AS MOST ANYBODY CAN REMEMBER, WHICH IS CAUSE FOR SOME SPECULATION, NATURALLY.



OBVIOUSLY, HE'S NO ORDINARY HUMAN-TYPE BEING. MY GUESS IS THAT HE DOESN'T EVEN EXIST IN ANY TRUE CORPOREAL FORM. MOST LIKELY, HE'S JUST SOME VIDEO CONSTRUCT--A DIGITAL SIMULACRUM IF YOU WILL--THAT THEY USE AS A KIND OF VISUAL SEDATIVE, COMPLEMENTING THE CHEMICAL ONE THEY PUT IN THEIR WONDER WAFERS.

AND WHO'S "THEM"--WHO REALLY RUNS HAPPYWORLD?



GOOD QUESTION. NO ONE ON THE OUTSIDE REALLY KNOWS. JUST SOME FACELESS BUNCH OF BUSINESSMEN WHO'VE RULED OVER A DRUGGED-OUT PLANET OF CONSPICUOUS-CONSUMING SLAVE LABOR FOR HUNDREDS OF YEARS!

AND YOU THINK THESE HAPPY, COMPLACENT SHEEP WILL RISE UP AT YOUR URGING AND THROW OFF THEIR CHAINS? WHY SHOULD THEY? I'LL BET THEY PREFER IT THIS WAY!



HOW COULD THEY PREFER IT, GIVEN AN HONEST CHOICE? WHAT'S MORE REAL AND GRATIFYING THAN A LIFE OF PASSION THAT ALSO HAS PAIN? WHERE'S THE HUMANITY IN THE BLAND, REGULATED LIVES THEY LEAD NOW?

JEEZ--HE SURE IS CLITE WHEN HE GETS WORKED UP.



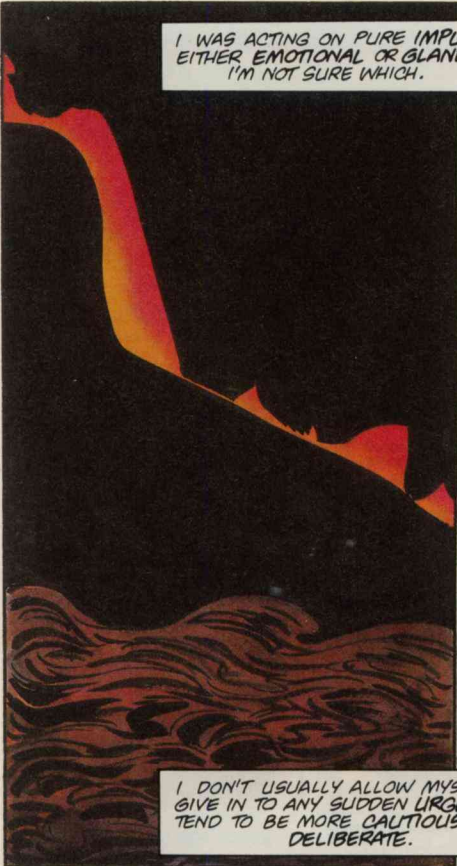
OF COURSE. I AGREE WITH YOU, FOWLER--I GUESS I'VE JUST GOT A LOT LESS FAITH IN HUMAN NATURE THAN YOU. I THINK MOST PEOPLE WOULD MUCH RATHER BE HAPPY ROBOTS THAN MANIC DEPRESSIVE FREE MEN....

IF I BELIEVED THAT, I'D PROBABLY COMMIT SUICIDE.




PLEASE, NOT JUST YET....

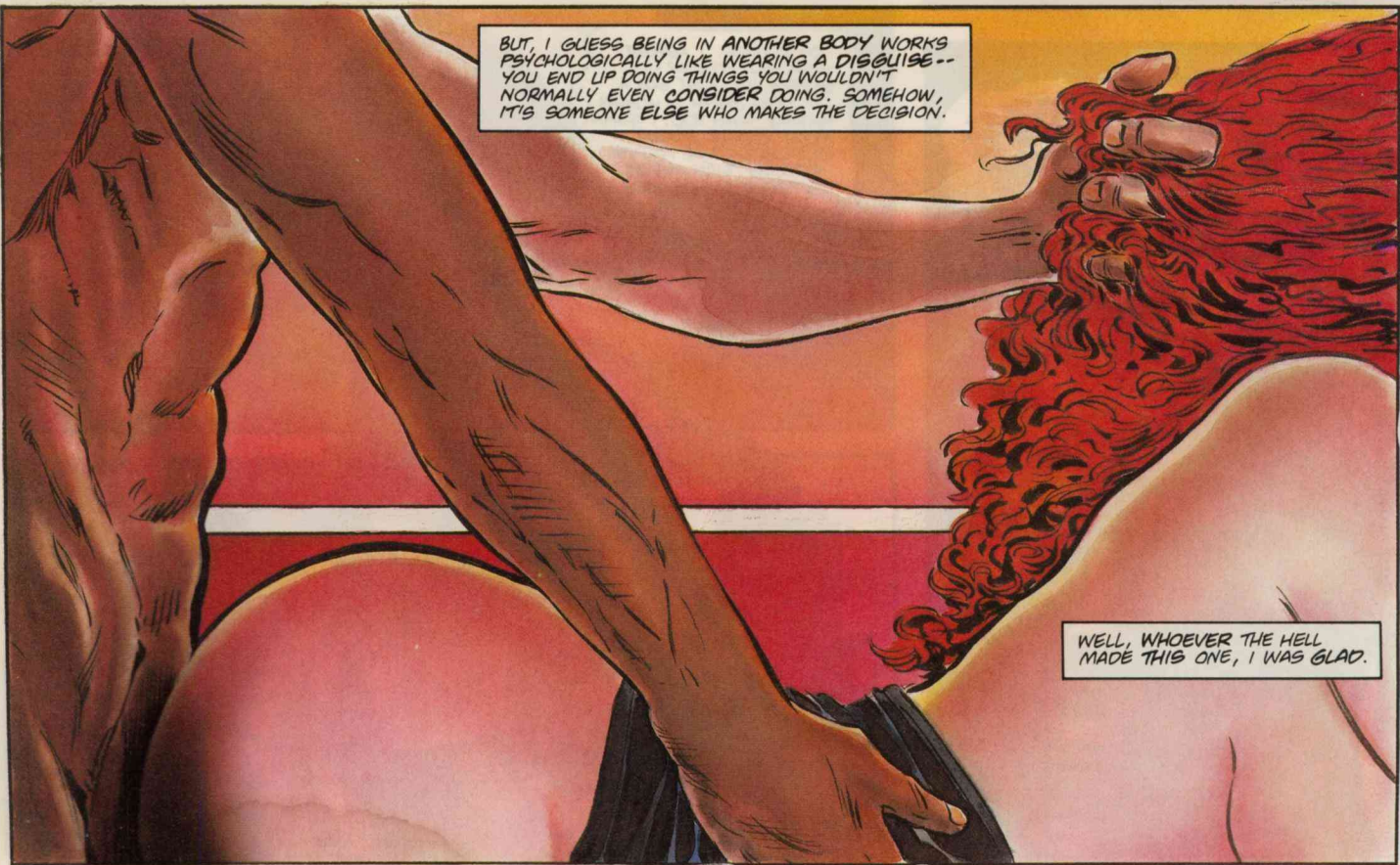
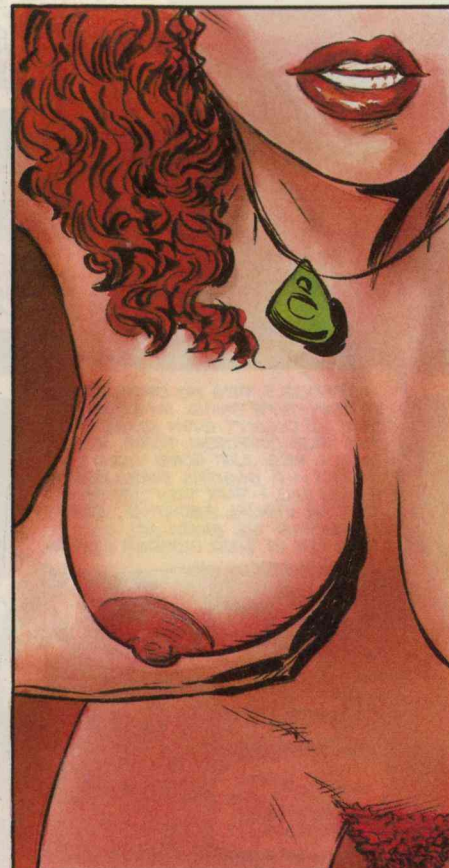




I WAS ACTING ON PURE IMPULSE--  
EITHER EMOTIONAL OR GLANDULAR,  
I'M NOT SURE WHICH.



I DON'T USUALLY ALLOW MYSELF TO  
GIVE IN TO ANY SUDDEN LURGES. I  
TEND TO BE MORE CAUTIOUS, MORE  
DELIBERATE.



BUT, I GUESS BEING IN ANOTHER BODY WORKS  
PSYCHOLOGICALLY LIKE WEARING A DISGUISE--  
YOU END UP DOING THINGS YOU WOULDN'T  
NORMALLY EVEN CONSIDER DOING. SOMEHOW,  
IT'S SOMEONE ELSE WHO MAKES THE DECISION.

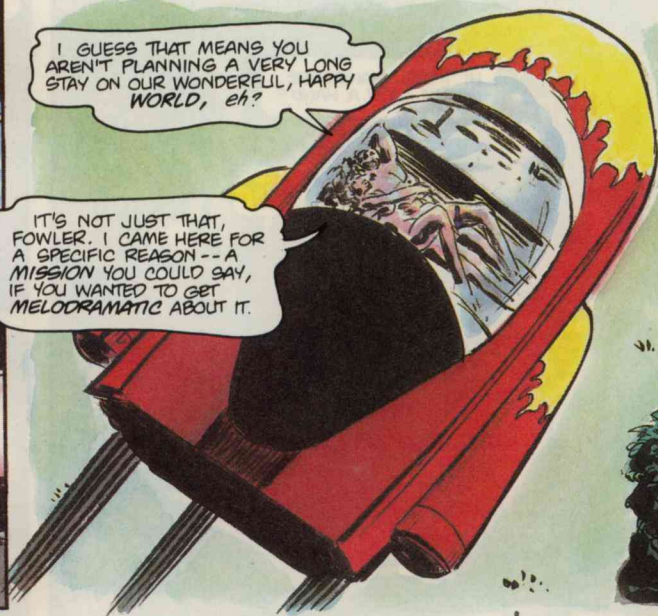
WELL, WHOEVER THE HELL  
MADE THIS ONE, I WAS GLAD.





UH, YOU DON'T WASTE MUCH TIME, DO YOU?

I DON'T HAVE THAT LUXURY, NO.



I GUESS THAT MEANS YOU AREN'T PLANNING A VERY LONG STAY ON OUR WONDERFUL, HAPPY WORLD, EH?

IT'S NOT JUST THAT, FOWLER. I CAME HERE FOR A SPECIFIC REASON-- A MISSION YOU COULD SAY, IF YOU WANTED TO GET MELODRAMATIC ABOUT IT.



A JOB IS PROBABLY MORE ACCURATE.

I'VE BEEN HIRED TO STEAL SOME OF THE NEUROCHEMICALS THAT ARE USED IN THE MANUFACTURE OF YOUR WONDER WAFERS.

THOSE SUBSTANCES, WHEN COMBINED WITH OTHERS-- SOME THAT I'VE ALREADY GOTTEN, OTHERS THAT I'VE YET TO-- WILL FORM A SORT OF LIVING DRUG, AN ORGANISM THAT WILL PROLONG LIFE WHEN INTRODUCED INTO A HOST BODY.



AND I'LL BET YOU WANT ME TO LIBERATE THESE CHEMICALS FOR YOU FROM THE WAFER WORKS DOWN THERE, EH?

NOT EXACTLY-- I'M PERFECTLY CAPABLE OF DOING IT MYSELF, BUT I COULD STAND SOME HELP IF YOU'RE UP TO IT...



AND HOW COULD I REFUSE?





HI THERE, HANDSOME. GIVE A LADY A HAND?

HUH?



WHY, SURE SNEE-- ER, MISS! WHAT SEEMS TO BE THE PROBLEM?



THAT SILLY AIRCAR OF MINE JUST KEEPS BREAKING DOWN. I DON'T KNOW WHAT COULD BE WRONG WITH IT!

I'LL BE HAPPY TO TAKE A LOOK!



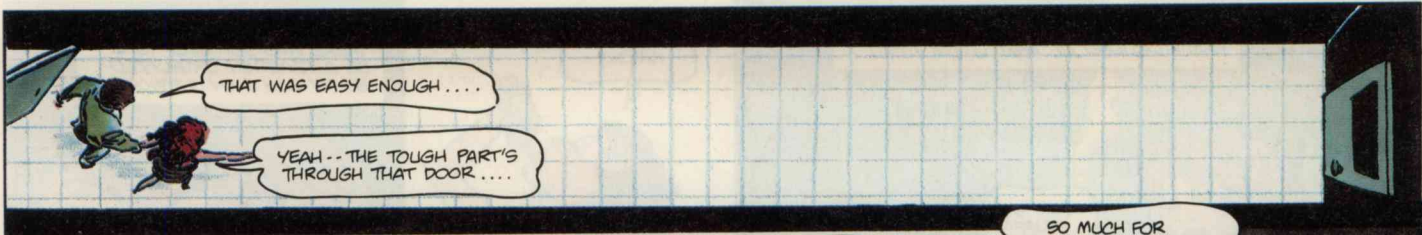
IT MIGHT JUST NEED A LITTLE REST, THOUGH. LAST TIME IT STARTED UP FINE AFTER A FEW MINUTES!

PARDON ME A MOMENT, MISS-- DUTY CALLS.

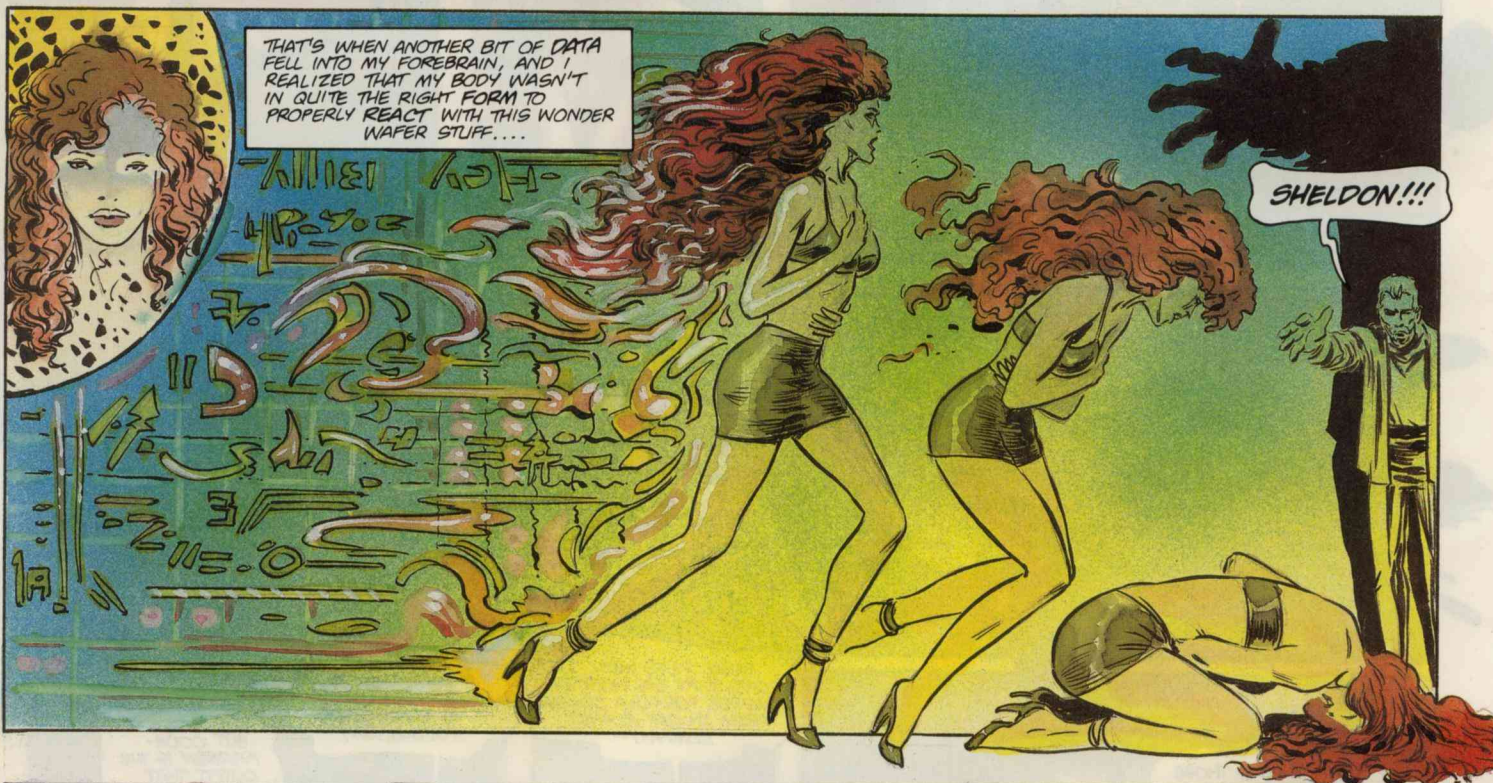
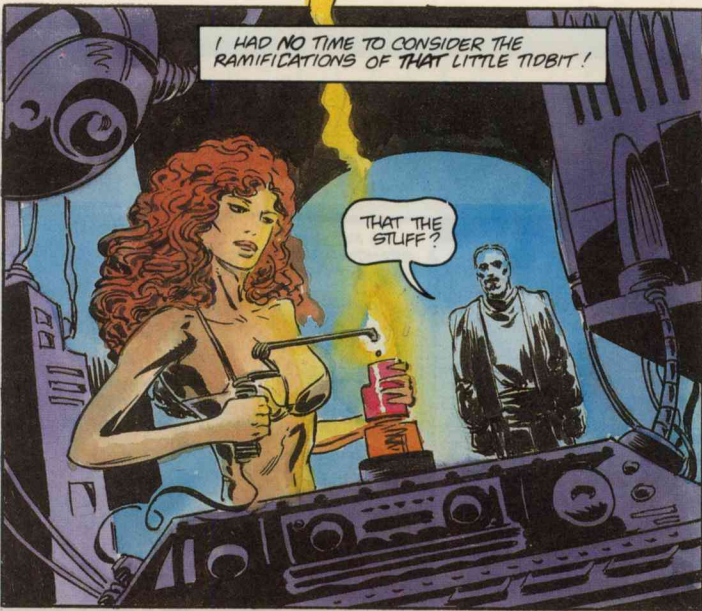
WOULD YOU? I'D BE EVER SO GRATEFUL!

YOU BET YOUR LIFE I'LL HOLD FOR GROUCHO! HOW MUCH DID YOU SAY THE JACKPOT WAS?

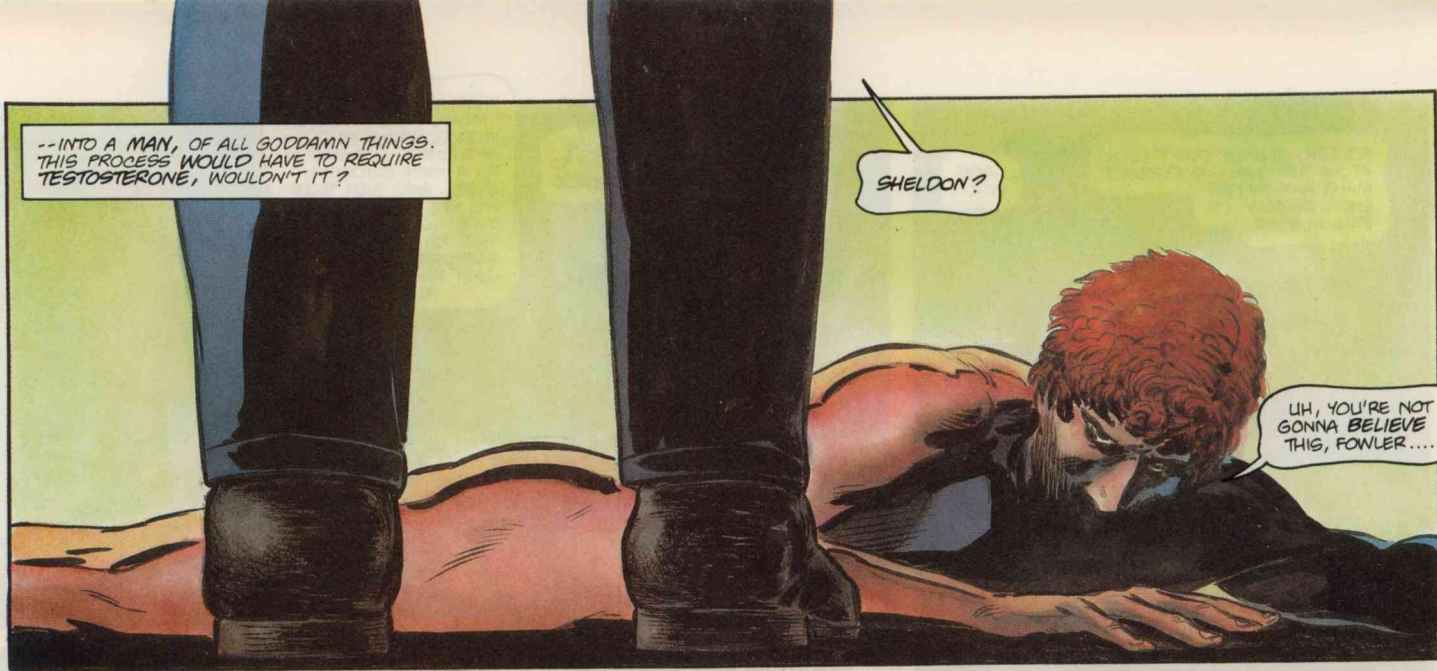












--INTO A MAN, OF ALL GODDAMN THINGS. THIS PROCESS WOULD HAVE TO REQUIRE TESTOSTERONE, WOULDN'T IT?

SHeldon?

UH, YOU'RE NOT GONNA BELIEVE THIS, FOWLER....



I'M WHAT YOU CALL A POLYMORPH-- A SHAPE-CHANGER.



I GOT THIS GOB OF BIO-ENGINEERING IN MY HEAD THAT ALLOWS ME TO TRANSFORM MYSELF AT WILL, REALIGNING MY MOLECULAR STRUCTURE TO MIMIC ANY LIFE-FORM THAT I WISH.



QUITE A HANDY LITTLE TALENT, DON'T YOU THINK?

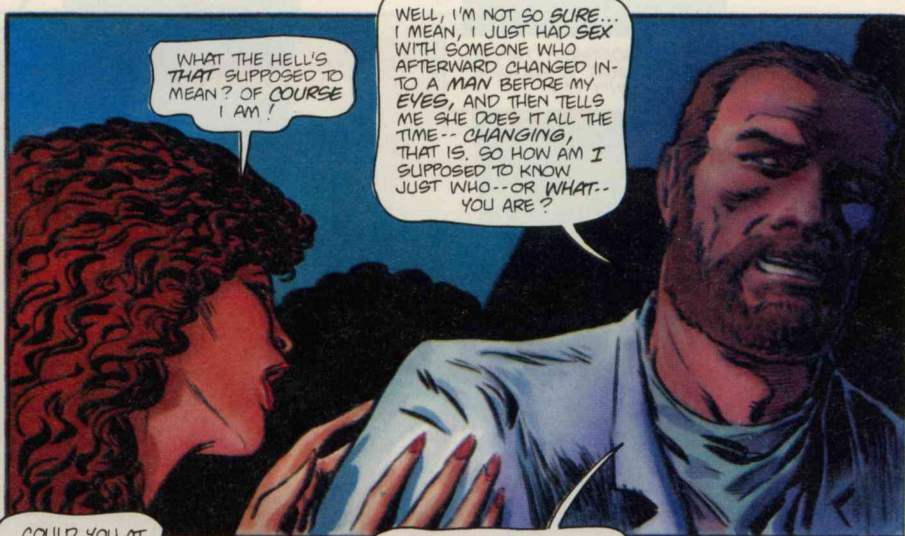
FOWLER?





FOWLER, PLEASE DON'T LOOK AT ME THAT WAY--IT DOESN'T MAKE ANY DIFFERENCE, REALLY. I'M STILL HUMAN.

ARE YOU?

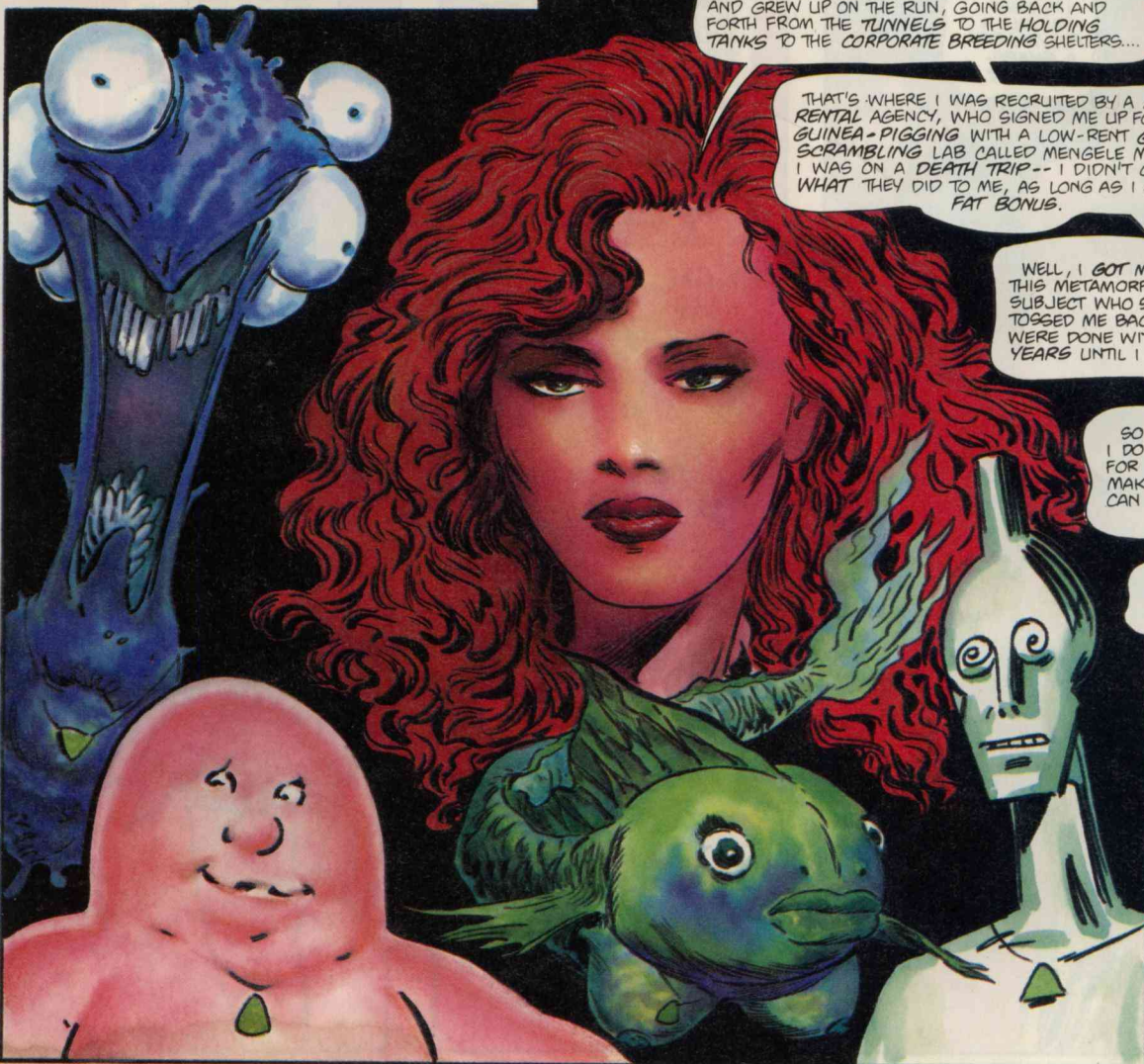


WHAT THE HELL'S THAT SUPPOSED TO MEAN? OF COURSE I AM!

WELL, I'M NOT SO SURE... I MEAN, I JUST HAD SEX WITH SOMEONE WHO AFTERWARD CHANGED INTO A MAN BEFORE MY EYES, AND THEN TELLS ME SHE DOES IT ALL THE TIME--CHANGING, THAT IS. SO HOW AM I SUPPOSED TO KNOW JUST WHO--OR WHAT--YOU ARE?

COULD YOU AT LEAST GIVE ME A MINUTE TO EXPLAIN?

I DON'T KNOW HOW YOU POSSIBLY COULD, BUT I GUESS I CAN LET YOU TRY.



IT GOES BACK TO WHEN I WAS A KID... I WAS ABANDONED IN THE INTERZONE--NEVER KNEW MY PARENTS, OR EVEN IF I HAD ANY--AND GREW UP ON THE RUN, GOING BACK AND FORTH FROM THE TUNNELS TO THE HOLDING TANKS TO THE CORPORATE BREEDING SHELTERS....

THAT'S WHERE I WAS RECRUITED BY A BODY-RENTAL AGENCY, WHO SIGNED ME UP FOR SOME GUINEA-PIGGING WITH A LOW-RENT GENE-SCRAMBLING LAB CALLED MENGELE MUTATIONS. I WAS ON A DEATH TRIP--I DIDN'T CARE WHAT THEY DID TO ME, AS LONG AS I GOT A FAT BONUS.

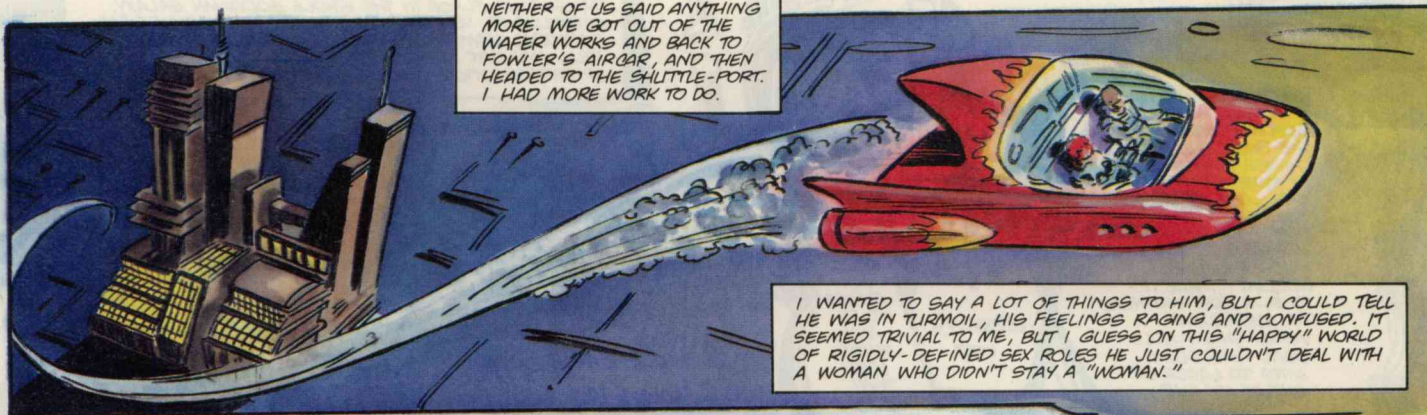
WELL, I GOT MY BONUS--BUT I ALSO GOT THIS METAMORPHIC CURSE. I WAS THE ONLY SUBJECT WHO SURVIVED THE TEST--AND THEY TOSSED ME BACK INTO THE STREET WHEN THEY WERE DONE WITH ME. I WAS MISERABLE FOR YEARS UNTIL I DECIDED TO MAKE THE BEST OF IT.

SO I TAKE THESE JOBS, WHERE I DO MY TRANSFORMATION ACT FOR SOME PURPOSE--SO I CAN MAKE A LIVING, AND ALSO SO I CAN DO SOME GOOD. CAN'T YOU UNDERSTAND THAT?

I'M SORRY-- I JUST DON'T KNOW....







NEITHER OF US SAID ANYTHING MORE. WE GOT OUT OF THE WAFER WORKS AND BACK TO FOWLER'S AIRCAR, AND THEN HEADED TO THE SHUTTLE-PORT. I HAD MORE WORK TO DO.

I WANTED TO SAY A LOT OF THINGS TO HIM, BUT I COULD TELL HE WAS IN TURMOIL, HIS FEELINGS RAGING AND CONFUSED. IT SEEMED TRIVIAL TO ME, BUT I GUESS ON THIS "HAPPY" WORLD OF RIGIDLY-DEFINED SEX ROLES HE JUST COULDN'T DEAL WITH A WOMAN WHO DIDN'T STAY A "WOMAN."



OBVIOUSLY, THIS WAS ONE HE HAD TO FIGURE OUT HIMSELF. I HAD TO LET HIM DO IT AT HIS OWN PACE.

MEN....

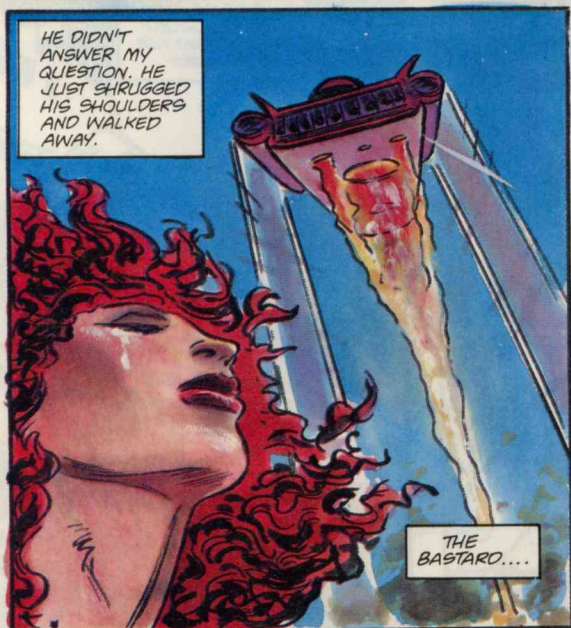


YOUR SHUTTLE BOARDS OVER THERE, IT LEAVES IN HALF AN HOUR.

WILL YOU STAY HERE AND WAIT WITH ME?

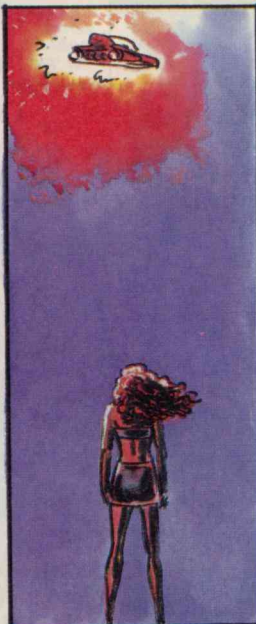
NO-- I'VE GOT TO GET BACK. I WANT TO SHOW ISIDORE WHAT WE FOUND AT THE WAFER WORKS.

WHAT ABOUT WHEN ALL THIS IS OVER? WILL I SEE YOU AGAIN?



HE DIDN'T ANSWER MY QUESTION. HE JUST SHRUGGED HIS SHOULDERS AND WALKED AWAY.

THE BASTARD....



I CAUGHT THE NEXT SHUTTLE AND GOT THE HELL OUT OF THERE.



THIS FUCKING  
JOB WAS RIPPING THE  
HELL OUT OF ME. I'D EX-  
PECTED THE PHYSICAL  
DOWNSIDE-- I WAS  
GETTING WEAKER ALL  
THE TIME, AND EACH  
CHANGE WAS INFINITE-  
LY MORE PAINFUL THAN  
THE LAST. IT WAS THE  
EMOTIONAL RAVAGING  
THAT I WASN'T PRE-  
PARED FOR, AND WHAT  
MADE ME THINK I  
WOULDN'T MAKE IT.  
PLUS, A BURNING NODE  
OF SUSPICION  
ABOUT THIS WHOLE  
DEAL WAS BEGIN-  
NING TO LASER UP  
OUT OF MY SUB-  
CONSCIOUS,  
MAKING ME  
DISTINCTLY  
LINEASY.

SO  
HERE I  
WAS--A  
BURNED-  
OUT  
WRECK--ON  
A  
PLANET  
WHERE  
I COULD  
NOT  
AFFORD  
TO BE  
ANY-  
THING  
LESS  
THAN  
TOTALLY  
VIGILANT.  
GREAT.

DON'T LET THE INNOCUOUS-SOUNDING NAME FOOL YOU--  
CARMILLA IS QUITE POSSIBLY THE MOST DEADLY-  
DANGEROUS PLACE IN THE WHOLE GODDAMN GALAXY.  
CARMILLIANS YOU SEE, ARE YOUR BASIC MONOSEXUAL  
CANNIBAL VAMPIRES-- WHICH MEANS THEY HUNT,  
KILL, AND EAT EACH OTHER FOR THE COMBINED PURPOSES  
OF REPRODUCTION, NOURISHMENT, AND COMPUSSION.

AND LATELY--  
THE LAST FEW  
THOUSAND YEARS  
OR SO--THEY'VE  
EXPANDED THEIR  
HORIZONS INTO  
THE SPORTING,  
SCIENTIFIC,  
ARTISTIC, AND  
COMMERCIAL  
ASPECTS OF  
KILLING AS WELL.

CHARMING  
BLINCH OF  
GUYS, EH?

THEY'VE MARKED THEIR BELLIGERENCE TO THE  
REST OF THE GALAXY-- SUPPLYING, FOR A VERY  
STEEP PRICE, THE LESS INGENUOUS AMONG US  
WITH THE SKILLS AND TECHNOLOGY OF GENOCIDE.

THERE'S A COMMODITY FOR  
WHICH DEMAND ALWAYS OUT-  
STRIPS SUPPLY.

AND, YOU  
GOTTA  
GIVE IT  
TO 'EM--

--THEY DO SHOW  
AN UNEQUALLED  
ENTHUSIASM FOR  
THEIR WORK....

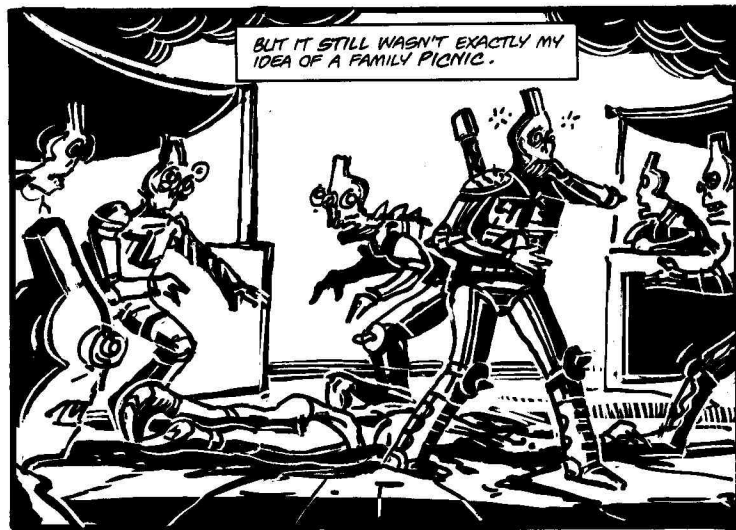




THEY ALSO SEEM TO SEE THINGS ONLY IN MONOCHROMES, WHICH IS LUCKY FOR ME.



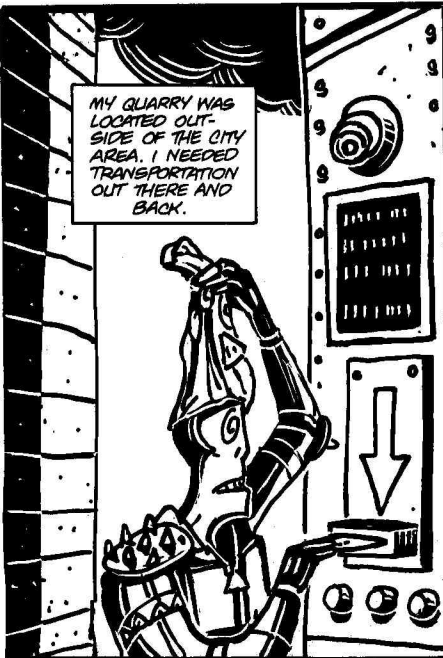
I DON'T THINK I COULD'VE TAKEN THE SIGHT OF ALL THAT BLOOD AND SAVAGERY, IF THE STUFF HAD BEEN RED. I CAN'T REALLY EXPLAIN IT, BUT SOMEHOW, BLOOD THAT'S RED SEEMS WORSE...



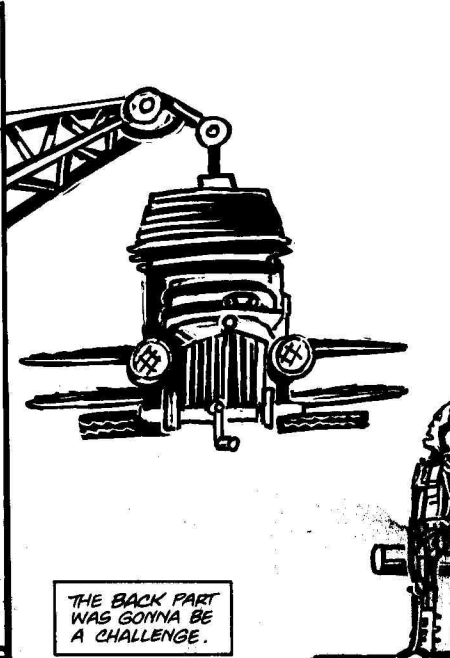
BUT IT STILL WASN'T EXACTLY MY IDEA OF A FAMILY PICNIC.



OBVIOUSLY, I HELD A MINORITY VIEWPOINT.



MY QUARRY WAS LOCATED OUTSIDE OF THE CITY AREA. I NEEDED TRANSPORTATION OUT THERE AND BACK.



THE BACK PART WAS GONNA BE A CHALLENGE.





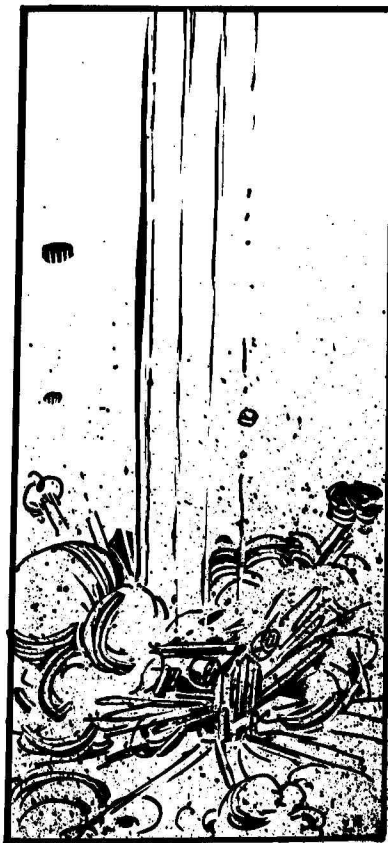
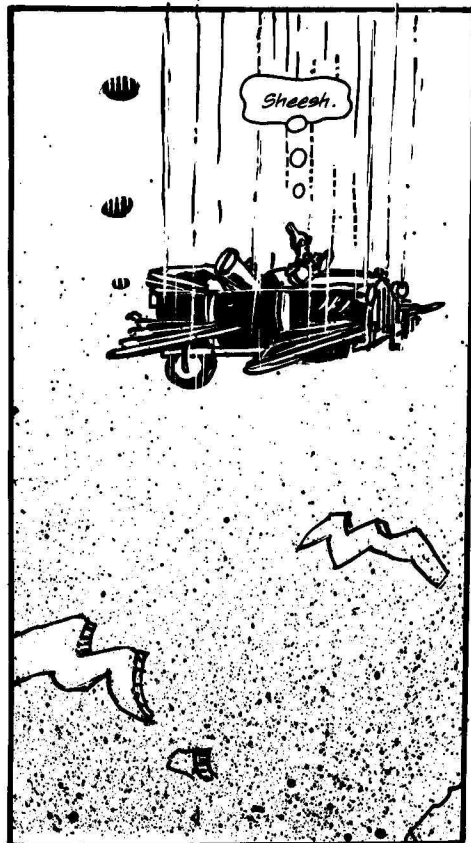
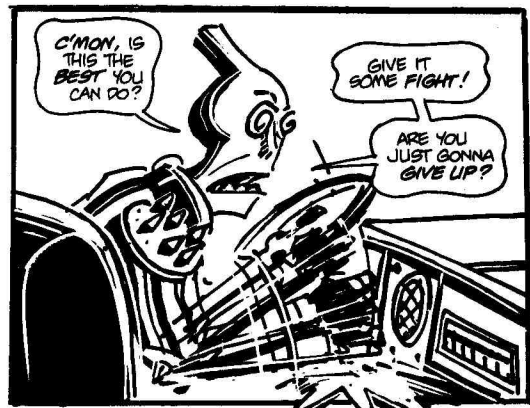
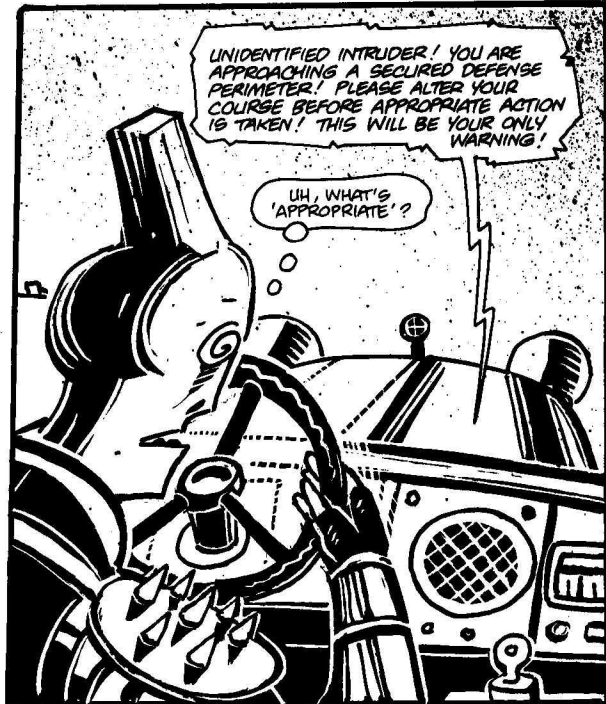
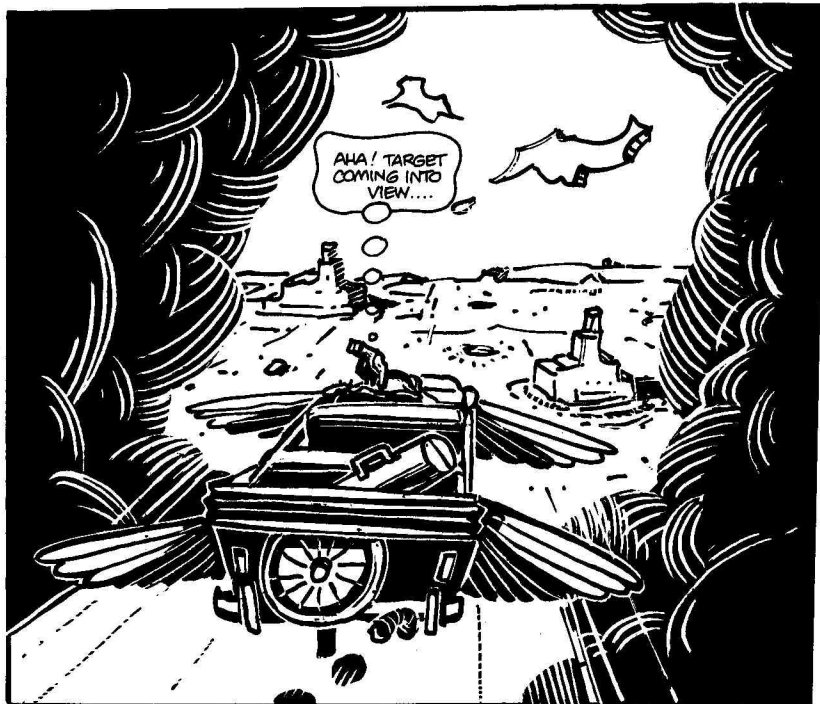
SO, OFF I WENT,  
INTO THE WILD  
BLACK YONDER...

...AND HAD MYSELF A  
TYPICAL, UNEVENTFUL  
DRIVE IN THE HUMDRUM  
CARMILLAN SKY.

YOU THINK MAYBE I SHOULD'VE FORMED  
OVER THE EXTRA DOUGH AND GOTTEN  
THE ONE WITH THE TWIN 50-CALIBERS?

NEXT TIME,  
I'LL KNOW....





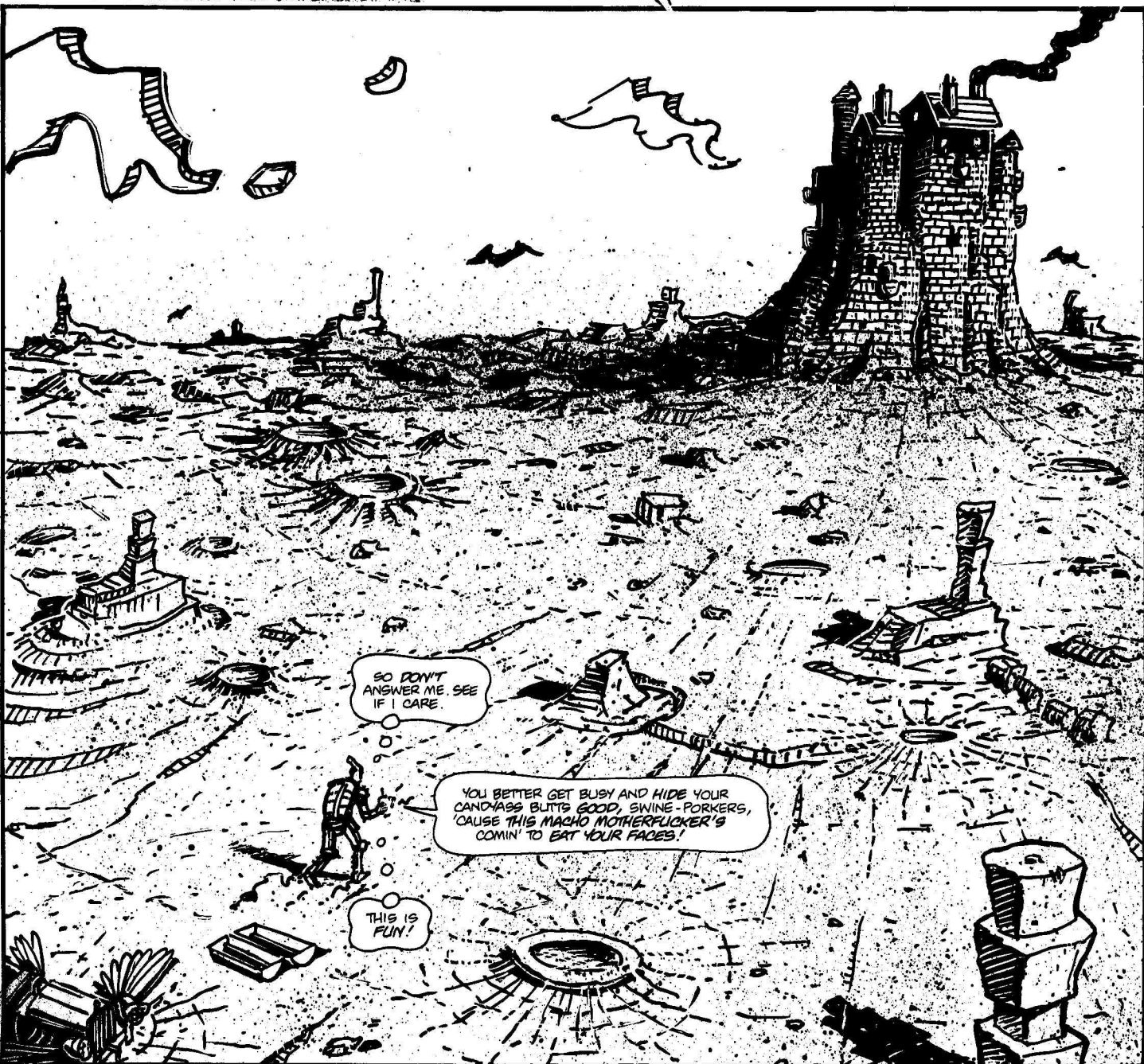


GUESS I SHOULD WHIP OUT THE ARSENAL, AND BE READY FOR WHAT-  
EVER ELSE IS WAITING FOR ME...

OH BOY!

LETHAL TOYS  
KINDA BRING  
OUT THE  
BEAST IN A  
FELLAH,  
DON'T THEY?

OKAY YOU CORPSE-  
GRINDING BLOODSUCKING  
FREAKS! TAKE YOUR  
BEST SHOT! I'M READY  
FOR YA!

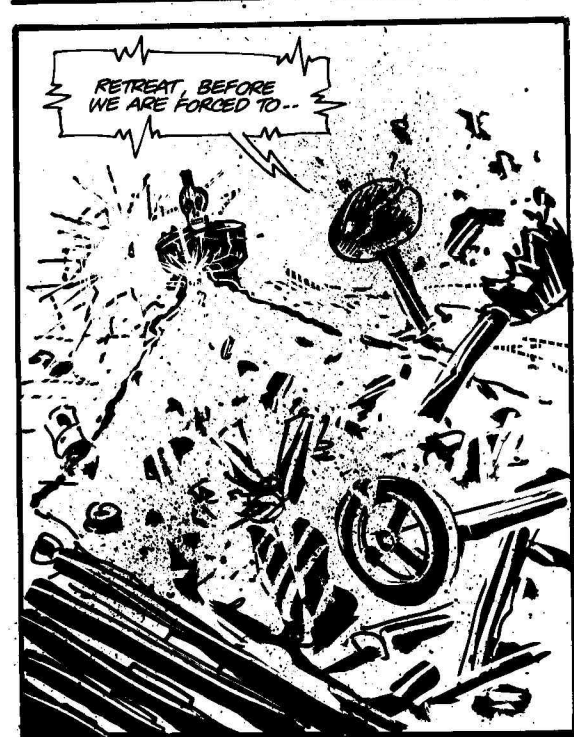
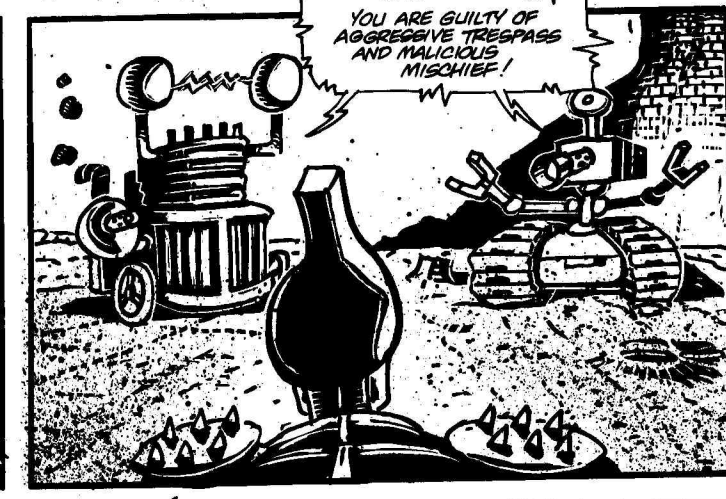
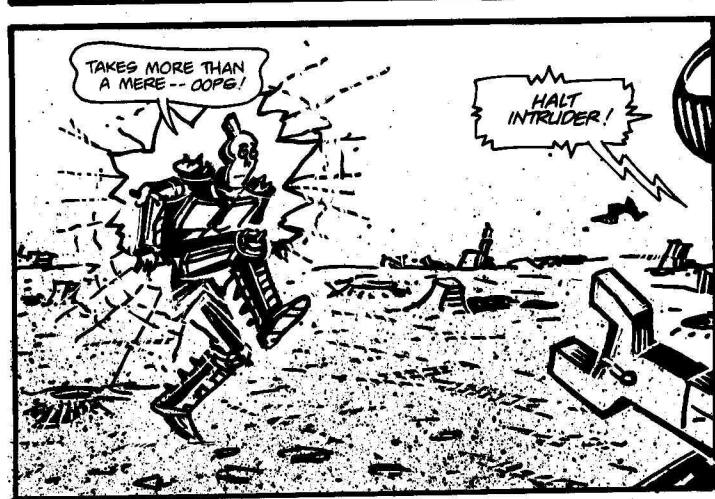
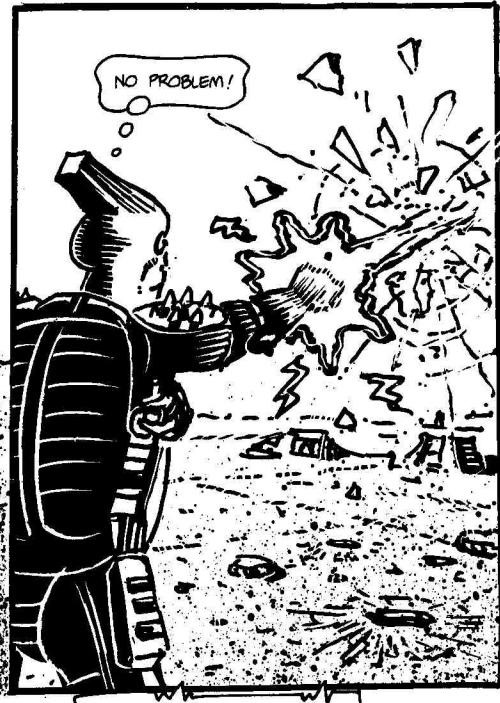
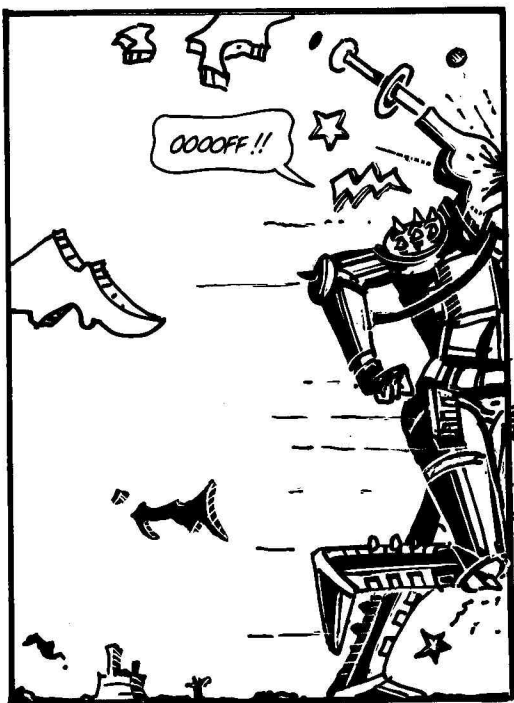


SO DON'T  
ANSWER ME, SEE  
IF I CARE.

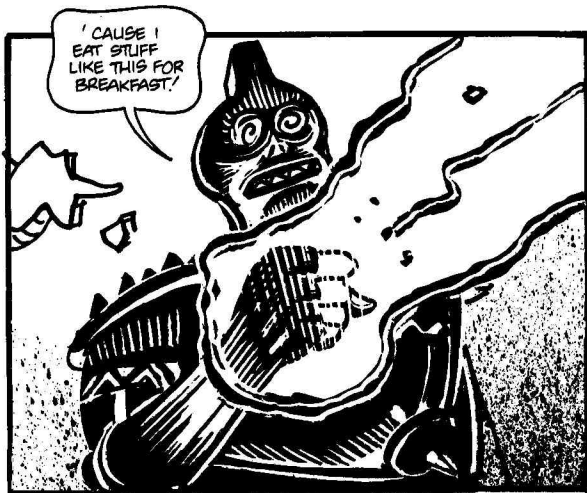
YOU BETTER GET BUSY AND HIDE YOUR  
CANDYASS BUTTS GOOD, SWINE-PORKERS,  
'CAUSE THIS MACHO MOTHERFUCKER'S  
COMIN' TO EAT YOUR FACES!

THIS IS  
FUN!

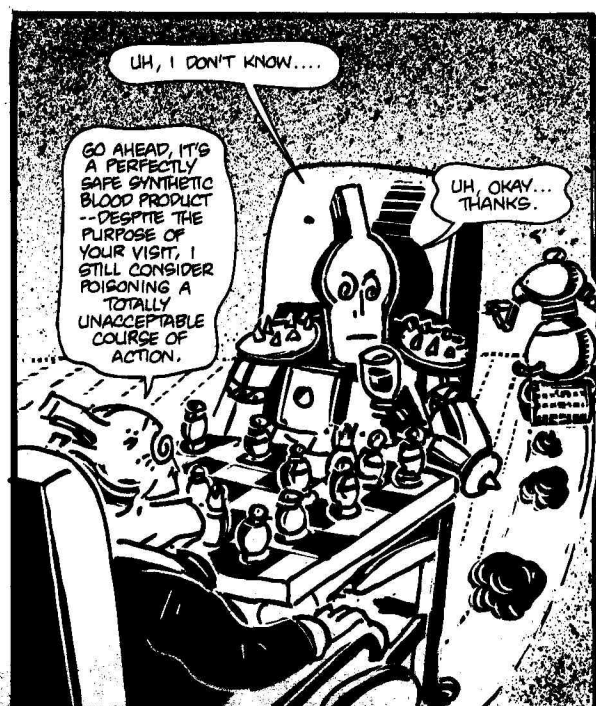
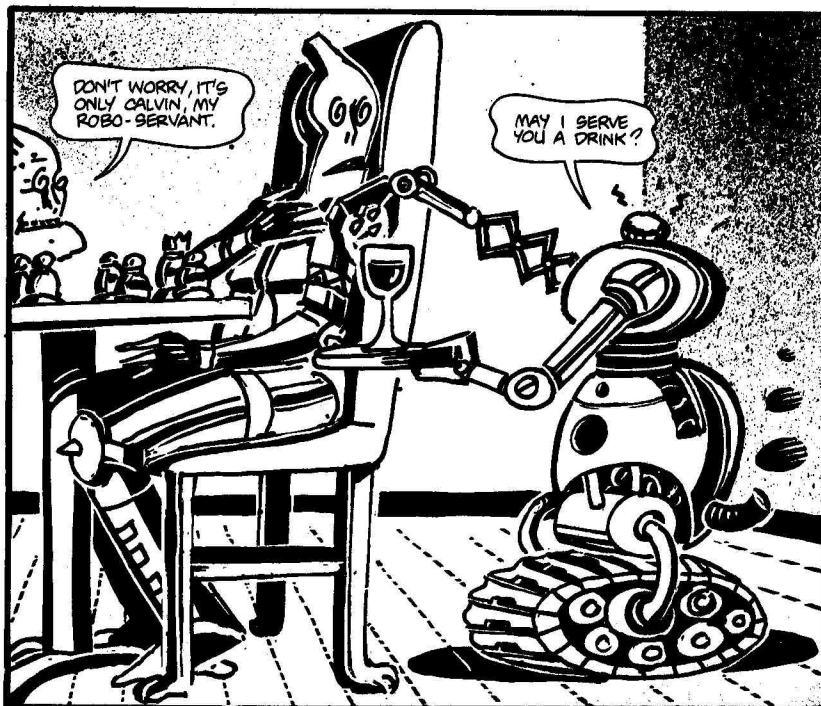
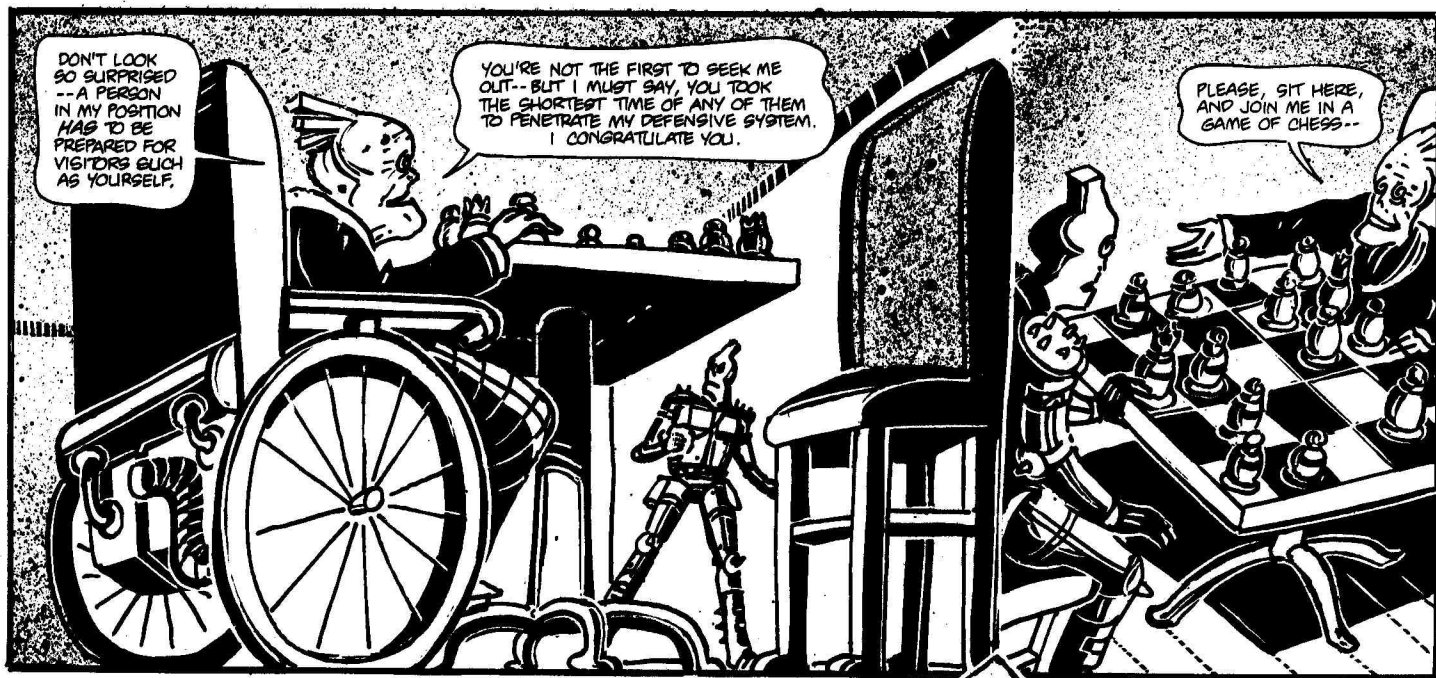




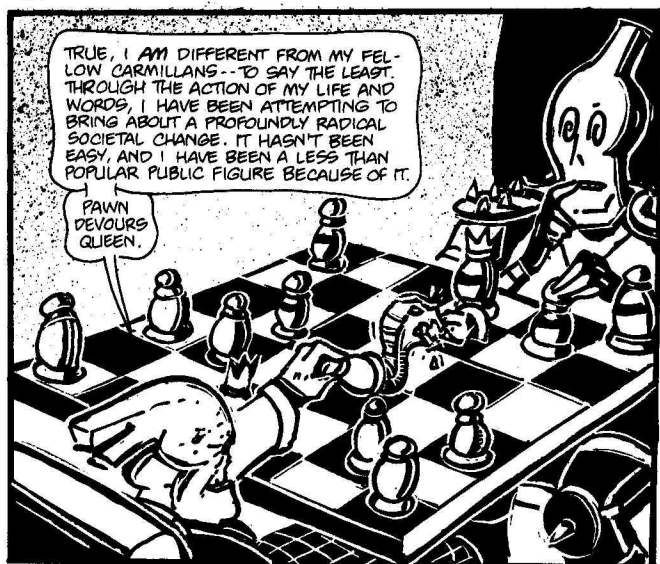




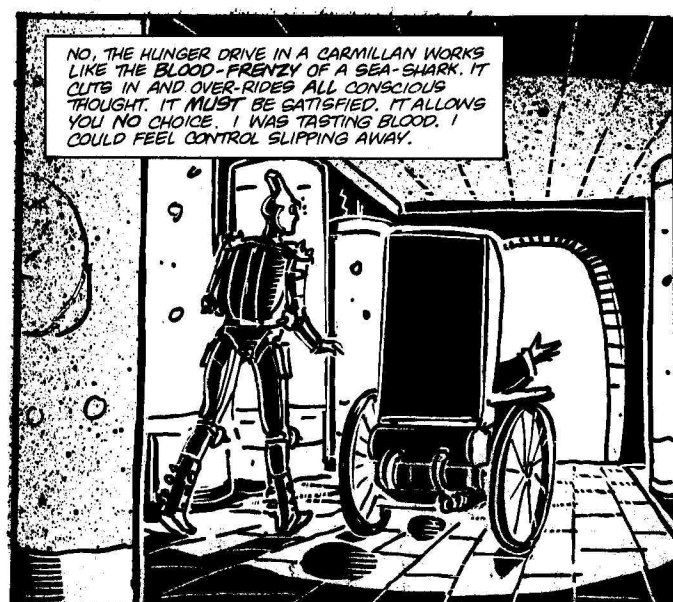
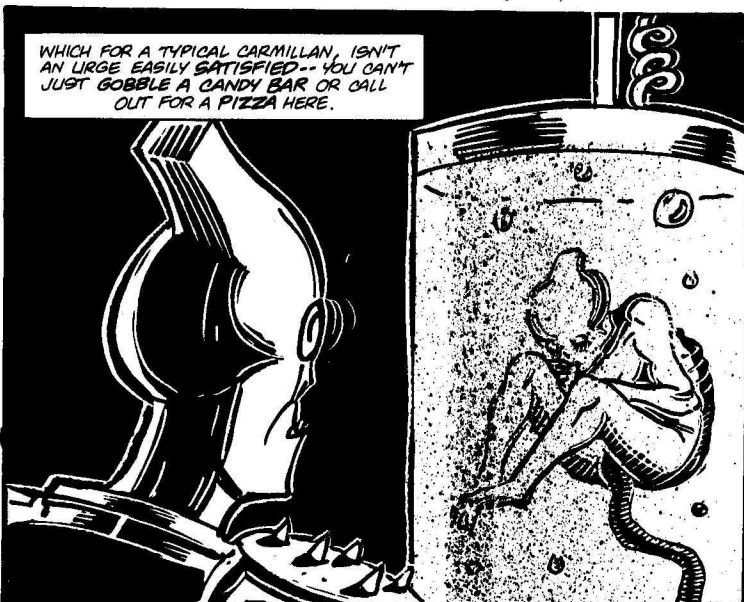
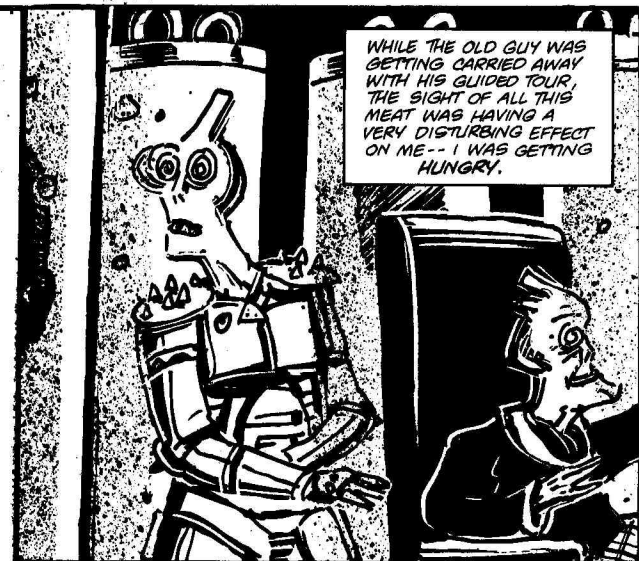
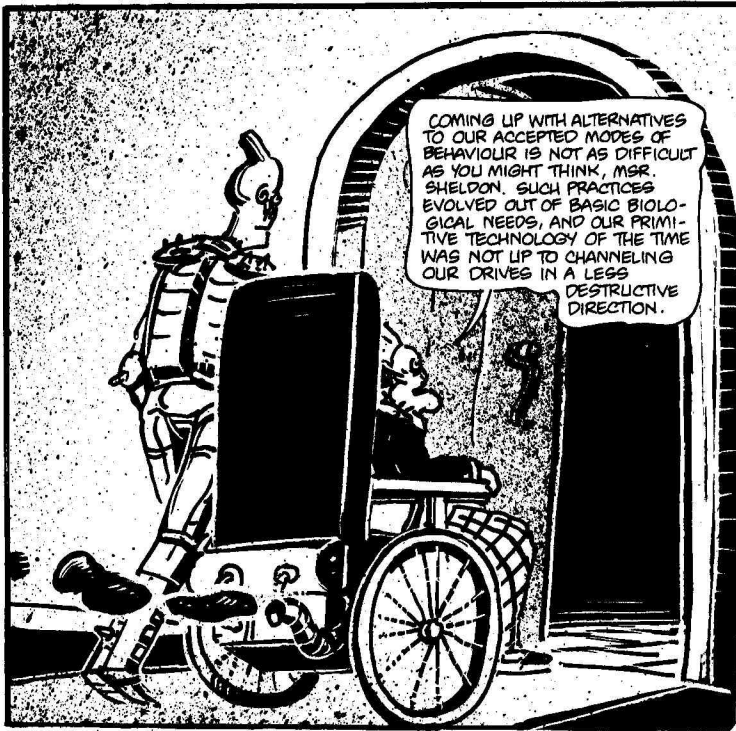




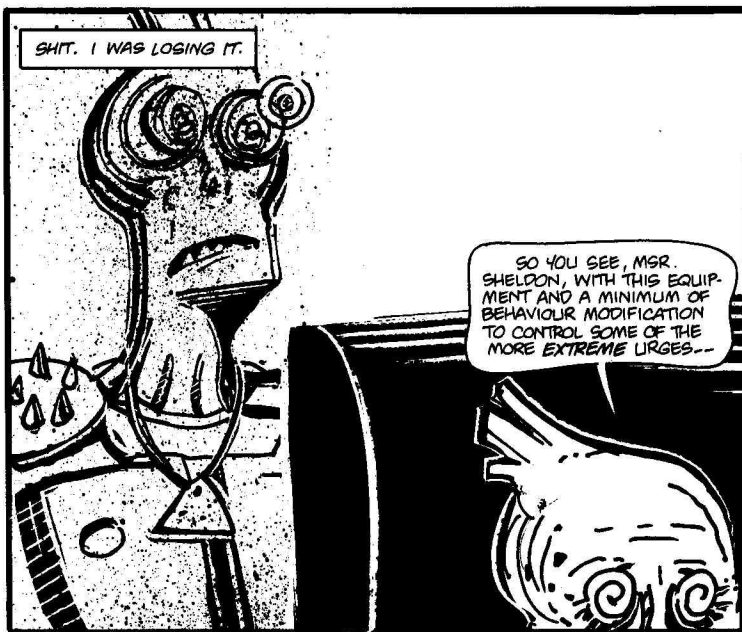






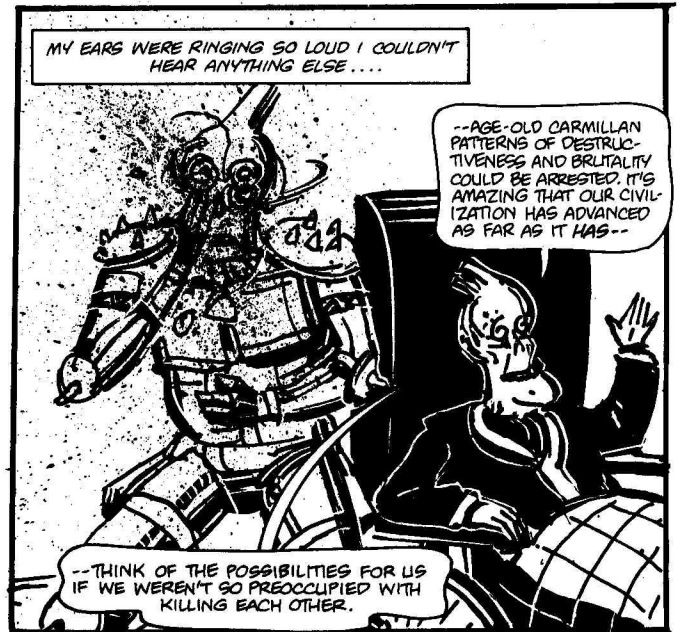






SHIT. I WAS LOSING IT.

SO YOU SEE, MRS. SHELDON, WITH THIS EQUIPMENT AND A MINIMUM OF BEHAVIOUR MODIFICATION TO CONTROL SOME OF THE MORE EXTREME URGES---



MY EARS WERE RINGING SO LOUD I COULDN'T HEAR ANYTHING ELSE....

--AGE-OLD CARMILLAN PATTERNS OF DESTRUCTIVENESS AND BRUTALITY COULD BE ARRESTED. IT'S AMAZING THAT OUR CIVILIZATION HAS ADVANCED AS FAR AS IT HAS--

--THINK OF THE POSSIBILITIES FOR US IF WE WEREN'T SO PREOCCUPIED WITH KILLING EACH OTHER.



AND MY STOMACH, SCREAMING FOR MEAT, HAD SEIZED UP INTO A FIST OF NEED....

MRS. SHELDON? ARE YOU-- OH, I SEE. PARDON MY OWN PREOCCUPATION. I FAILED TO NOTICE THAT YOU WERE HAVING AN ATTACK.

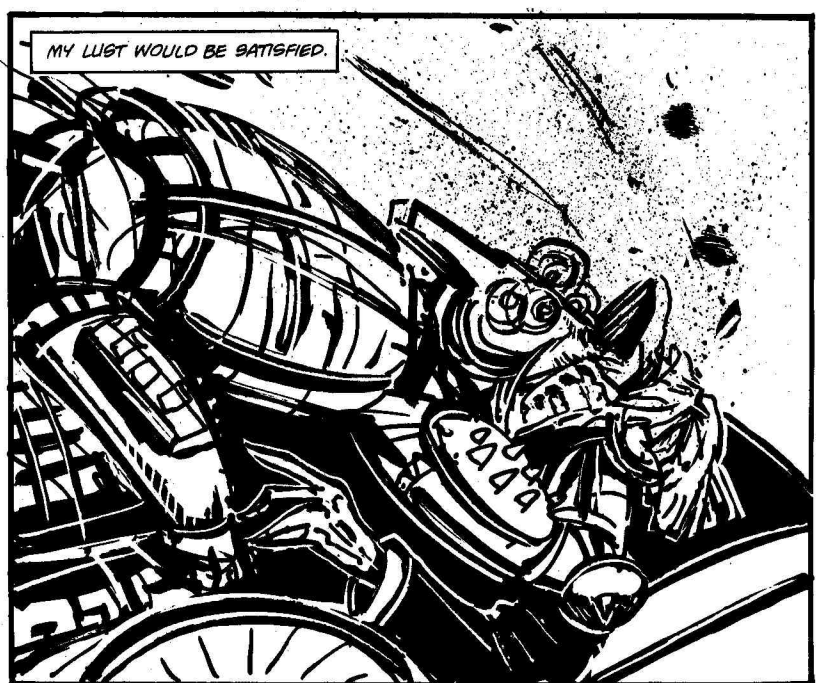


THAT WAS IT. I WAS GONE. OVER THE EDGE. AND HE WAS OFFERING ME HIS THROAT....

THE TIME HAS COME, HASN'T IT? WELL, I SUPPOSE I'M READY....



MY BODY TOOK OVER. I WAS A MERE PASSENGER.



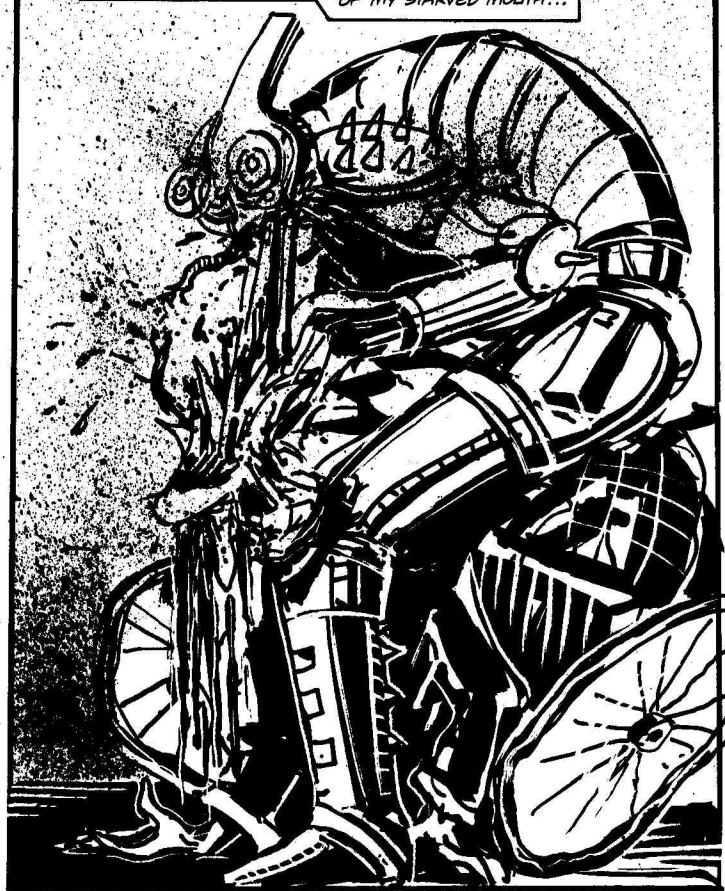
MY LUST WOULD BE SATISFIED.



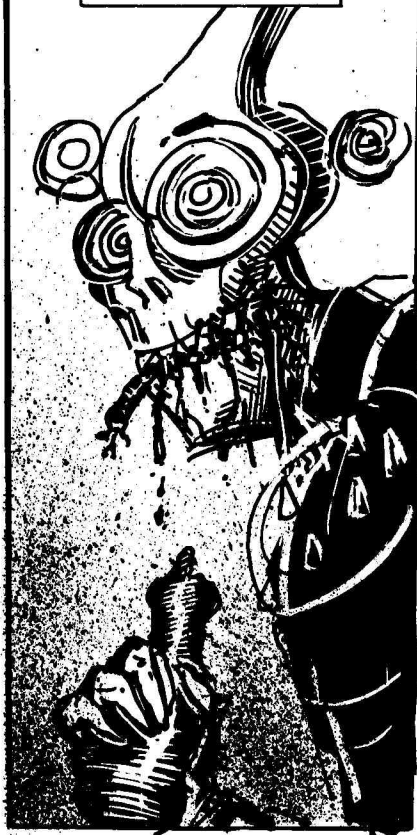
IT WAS LIKE WATCHING SOME DISTANT, FLICKERING MOVIE. I FELT NOTHING, TASTED NOTHING. IT WAS HAPPENING SOMEWHERE ELSE.



I HEARD THE RIPPING AND TEARING SOUNDS, THE OLD MAN'S DYING SCREAMS, THE GREEDY SLURPING OF MY STARVED MOUTH...



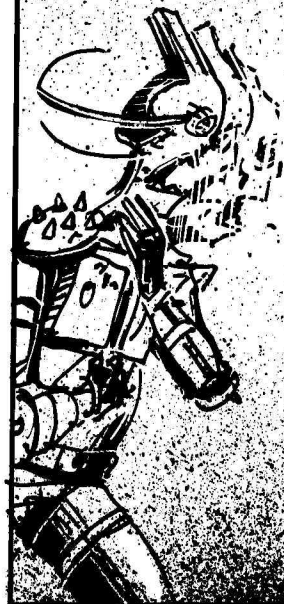
SUDDENLY, I TASTED THE BLOOD AND FLESH. FELT THE TEXTURE, THE SLICKNESS OF IT ON MY LIPS.



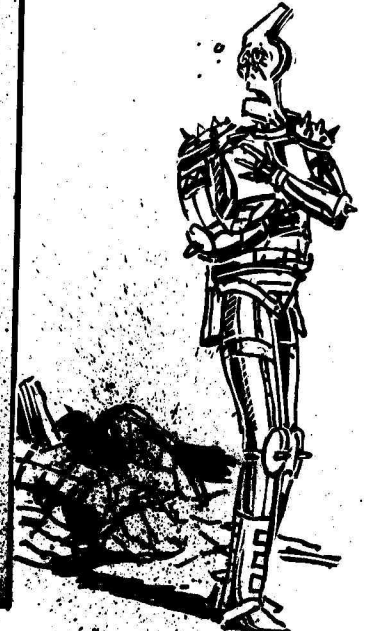
CONSCIOUSNESS HAD RETURNED TO ME, ALONG WITH THE AWARENESS OF WHAT I'D DONE.



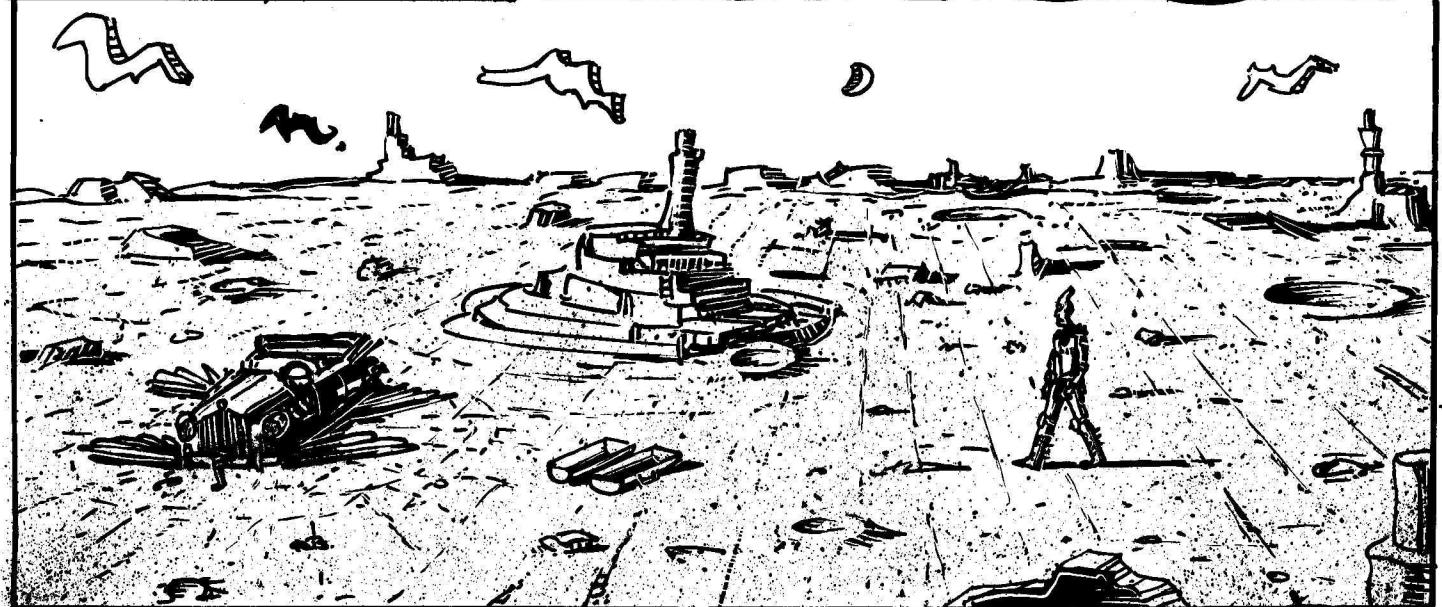
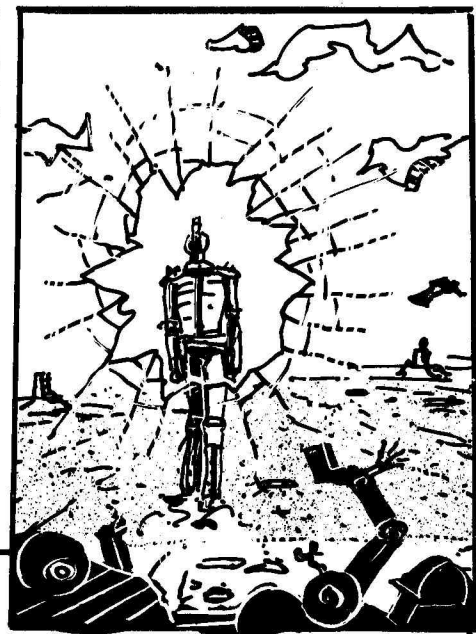
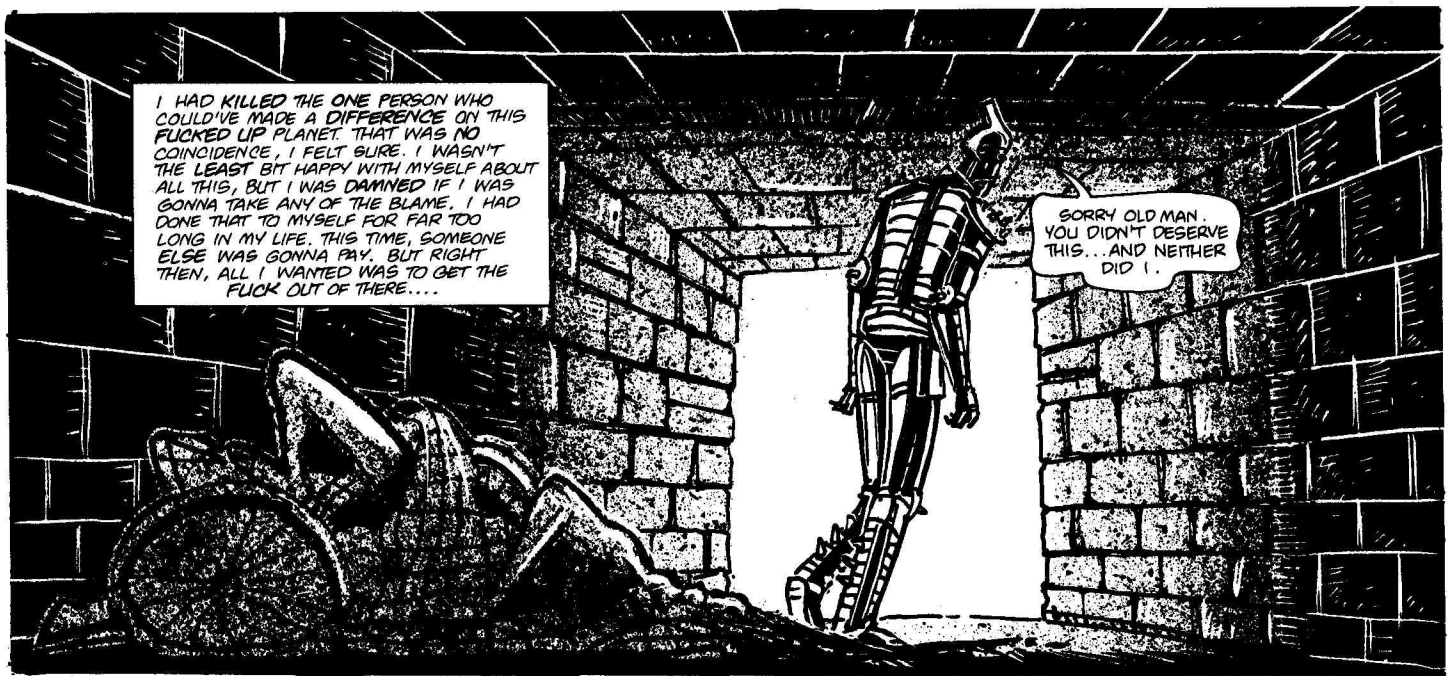
I WAS SICK, REVOLTED. MY THROAT CONVULSED, TRYING TO VOMIT. NOTHING CAME UP.



MY BODY HAD WHAT IT WANTED, AND IT WASN'T ABOUT TO GIVE IT UP. MY "MISSION" WAS ACCOMPLISHED.











MY FIRST LOOK IN A MIRROR ON MY RETURN TO THE INTERZONE WAS NOT A PRETTY SIGHT....

JEEZ, WHAT A WRECK!

AND I FELT WORSE THAN I LOOKED, IF YOU CAN BELIEVE THAT. THE THING IN MY STOMACH HAD REACHED SOME KIND OF CRITICAL MASS -- I COULD FEEL IT BULGING DOWN THERE LIKE SOME MUTANT MONSTER HELL-KID KICKING TO ANNOUNCE ITS IMMINENT BIRTH. WHATEVER THE DAMN THING WAS, IT WAS ALMOST READY TO POP OUT OF THE OVEN AND WAVE HELLO.

BUT THE SHITTINESS I FELT, COURTESY OF THE STRAIN THAT THING PUT ON MY BODY AS WELL AS ALL THE CHANGING I'D HAD TO DO -- THE LATTER MADE MANIFEST BY THE CARMILLAN BLACK-AND-WHITE MODE MY BRAIN SEEMED TO BE STILL STUCK IN -- WAS NOTHING COMPARED TO HOW PISSED OFF I WAS.

I WAS DAMN TIRED OF BEING USED, AND EVEN WORSE, BEING KEPT IN THE DARK ABOUT WHAT I WAS BEING USED FOR.

IT WAS TIME FOR SOME ANSWERS.



INSTEAD OF JUST FILING A  
STANDARD REPORT, I  
PUNCHED IN A CALL TO THE  
DIRECTOR....

LET THAT OLD ZOMBIE - FART  
JUST TRY AND WEASEL HIS  
WAY OUT OF THIS.

THAT HORRIBLE LITTLE  
DOGBOT ANSWERED.

IT'S SHELTON.  
PUT THE  
DIRECTOR ON.

I'M SORRY, MRS. SHELTON,  
BUT THE DIRECTOR IS UNABLE  
TO SPEAK WITH YOU AT THE  
MOMENT. MAY I CONVEY A  
MESSAGE?

YEAH, BONE-BREATH,  
YOU CAN CONVEY A MESSAGE--  
TELL 'IM I WANT TO TALK TO HIM  
NOW.

THAT IS QUITE IMPOSSIBLE  
I'M AFRAID. HE IS UNDERGOING  
A RADICAL REJUVENATION PRO-  
CEDURE AT THIS TIME, AND IS--  
AS I SAID-- UNABLE TO SPEAK  
WITH YOU.

IS THERE A  
PROBLEM WITH  
YOUR ASSIGN-  
MENT?

YOU BET  
THERE'S A  
PROBLEM....



THE PROBLEM, DOBFACE, IS THIS WHOLE DAMN JOB. IT STINKS LIKE HELL, AND I'M DAMN TIRED OF NOT KNOWING WHAT'S GOING ON. I WANT THE TRUTH ABOUT THIS "ASSIGNMENT" RIGHT NOW!



YOU'VE BEEN TOLD EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW, MRS. SHELDON! YOU NEEDN'T WORRY ABOUT THE REST.

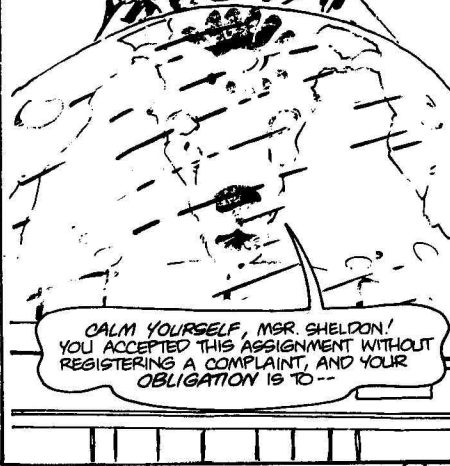


BULLSHIT! I'M RISKING MY ASS OUT HERE AND I'M BEGINNING TO REALIZE THAT I DON'T KNOW WHAT I'M RISKING IT FOR.



AND I'VE HAD IT!

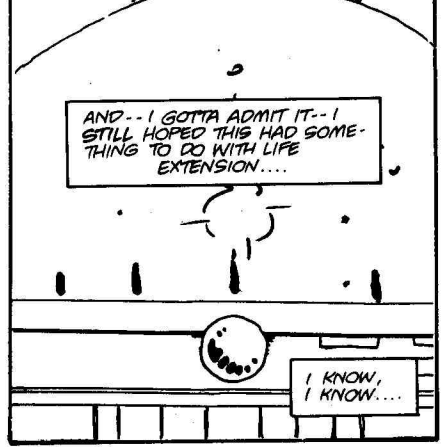
CALM YOURSELF, MRS. SHELDON! YOU ACCEPTED THIS ASSIGNMENT WITHOUT REGISTERING A COMPLAINT, AND YOUR OBLIGATION IS TO --



I CUT THE LITTLE SHIT OFF. OBVIOUSLY, I WAS GOING TO GET NOWHERE WITH HIM. I BRIEFLY CONSIDERED CHUCKING THE WHOLE GIG -- I SURE WAS PISSED ENOUGH -- BUT I REALIZED THAT'D LEAVE ME NOWHERE. AT LEAST IF I KEPT GOING, I'D HAVE A CHANCE OF GETTING TO THE BOTTOM OF IT. IF I SURVIVED.

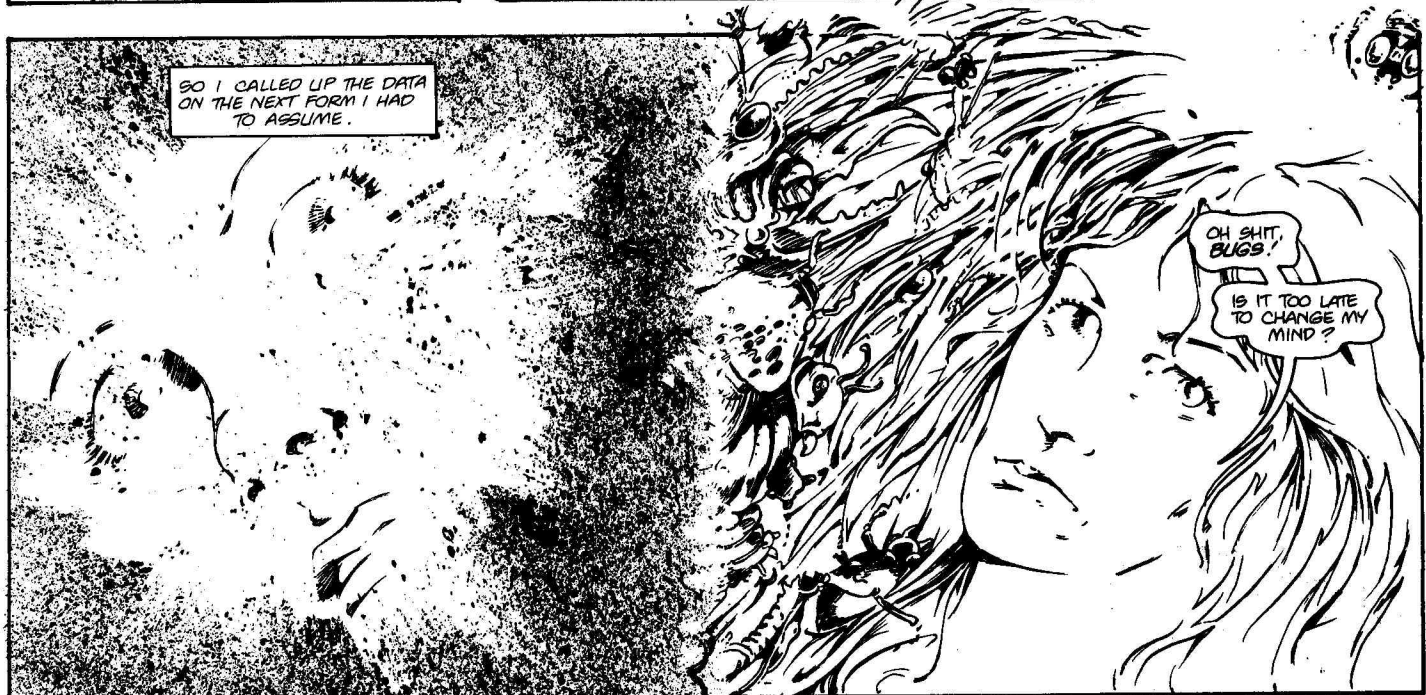


AND -- I GOTTA ADMIT IT -- I STILL HOPED THIS HAD SOMETHING TO DO WITH LIFE EXTENSION....



I KNOW, I KNOW....


SO I CALLED UP THE DATA ON THE NEXT FORM I HAD TO ASSUME.



OH SHIT, BUGS!

IS IT TOO LATE TO CHANGE MY MIND?





ON MY LIST OF LEAST FAVORITE LIFE-FORMS, BUGS ARE UP THERE IN THE TOP FIVE. MAKE THAT THE TOP TWO. THERE'S JUST SOMETHING ABOUT A SEGMENTED BODY AND LOTS OF LEGS THAT GIVES ME THE CREEPS. I CAN'T EXPLAIN IT. JUST INSTINCTIVE DISGUST, I GUESS.

SO, OF COURSE I HAD TO BECOME ONE OF THE WIGGLY LITTLE THINGS, RIGHT?

RIGHT.

BUG-WORLD BECKONED....


AND, SWALLOWING MY WILLIES, I ANSWERED THE HIVE-MAIDENS' SIREN CALL -- OR, MORE PROPERLY, SQUEAKS AND BUZZES, AS BUGS COMMUNICATE THROUGH A COMBINATION OF BODY MOVEMENTS, HIGH-PITCHED WHINES, AND WING-GENERATED HUMS. KINDA LIKE SOMEBODY TRYING TO TELL A STORY BY TAP DANCING AND PLAYING A KAZOO. GOOFY, BUT I GUESS IT GETS THE JOB DONE.

THE PLACE WASN'T A PLANET, REALLY-- MORE A CONGLOMERATION OF HIVES CLUMPED TOGETHER TO FORM A WORLD. SOCIO-POLITICALLY, IT WAS A LOOSE CONFEDERATION OF FEUDAL CITY-STATES THAT HAD AS LITTLE TO DO WITH EACH OTHER AS THEY COULD GET AWAY WITH. MAIN OCCUPATION WAS KEEPING EACH HIVE'S QUEEN FAT, WARM, AND HAPPY. MY JOB WAS TO PENETRATE ONE OF SAID QUEEN'S BOUDOIRS AND HELP MYSELF TO SEVERAL MOUTHFULS OF THE GOOPY NECTAR BREWED UP SPECIAL FOR THE OLD GIRL'S DELECTION.

WHICH PROMISED, NO DOUBT, TO BE YET ANOTHER PALATE-PLEASING PREPARATION, WHICH THIS "ASSIGNMENT" SEEMED TO HAVE NO END OF. I COULDN'T WAIT TO TASTE IT....

Kenneth Smith





THE HIVE WAS CRAWLING WITH DRONES, SCURRYING EVERYWHERE IN SERVICE OF THE LOCAL FAT LADY'S WHIMS. HORDES OF THE INDUSTRIOUS LITTLE BUGGERS WERE FLEEING THE PREMISES ON POLLEN-HUNTS, SWARMING BACK LATER WITH POUCHES BULGING.

THE CROWD REMINDED ME OF AN INTERZONE CONDOM GIVE-AWAY. I DECIDED TO JOIN IT AND SCOPE THE PLACE OUT.

AT THE MOMENT, IT LOOKED LIKE THE FLEET WAS IN-- DRONES WERE LINED UP BY THE THOUSAND, WAITING FOR THEIR TURN TO SQUEEZE THEIR BULBOUS BUG-BAGS INTO THE HEAD HONCHITA'S FEEDING TROUGH.

DRONES, BEING SINGLE-MINDED BEASTS OF RATHER LIMITED MENTAL ABILITIES, LACK THE NECIRAL SOFTWARE REQUIRED TO CONCENTRATE ON MORE THAN ONE THING AT A TIME. CONSEQUENTLY, MY RATHER OBVIOUS PRESENCE AMONG THEM WENT UNNOTICED. I JUST KEPT MY TRAP SHUT AND WENT WITH THE FLOW. PRETTY SOON, I SPOTTED THE FRONT OF THE LINE.

THE BUG-JUICE TANK APPEARED TO BE REACHING ITS HIGH WATER MARK. THAT MEANT ALL THE WORKER ANTS WOULD BE HITTING THE HAY ANY MINUTE NOW. I DECIDED TO BIDE MY TIME AND COME BACK LATER FOR MY BREW-SLURPING, WHEN THINGS WOULD BE LESS HECTIC.



AH YES, MUCH BETTER.

I WAS STILL HAVING A HELLUVA TIME GETTING THE HANG OF THIS DAMN INSECT SUIT, THOUGH. WHAT WITH THE OVER-STARCHED EXO-SKELETON AND ATTRACTIVELY BLIMP-LIKE THORAX, IT WAS A WONDER I COULD EVEN TAKE TWO CONSECUTIVE STEPS WITHOUT FALLING FLAT ON MY BUG-MUG.

YOW!

NOW WHY DID I JUST KNOW THAT WAS GONNA HAPPEN?

SURE HOPE THIS THING FLOATS....

SURPRISE! IT GOES DOWN FASTER THAN A LALALIAN ON STEROIDS!

AT LEAST BUGS HAVE BETTER TASTE IN GOOP THAN FISH!

WONDER IF THIS LITTLE WADING POOL HAS A BOTTOM....



FOUND IT!

OH, GREAT! I HAD POPPED  
THROUGH THE FEEDING SAC  
MEMBRANE INTO THE OLD  
BROAD'S LAP!

SCREEEEEEEE!

YAAH!

ULP!

HI THERE, QUEENIE--  
HOPE I DIDN'T WAKE  
YOU.

SCREEEEEEEEEEEE!

CHEEE!

CHEEE!

CHEEE!

YEAH, WELL SORRY  
TO EAT AND RUN LIKE  
THIS, BUT I'M SURE  
YOU UNDERSTAND....

SPOKE TOO  
SOON, I GUESS.

NO NEED TO SEE ME  
TO THE DOOR-- I KNOW  
THE WAY!







SCREEEEEEEE!


UH OH, LOOKS LIKE THE WHOLE DAMN HIVE IS ABOUT TO GET INTO THE ACT.

HONEST-- THERE'S NO NEED FOR ALL THIS FUSS!

LEMME OUTTA HERE!

THE SURFACE-- THANK GOD!





THINGS WERE LOOKING PRETTY GRIM. I FELT LIKE I WAS STUCK IN SOME HORRIBLE NIGHTMARE -- PURSUED BY A FACELESS BUG-HORDE INTENT ON DRAGGING ME INTO THE NEAREST ROACH MOTEL, UNABLE TO MOVE MY LEGS FAST ENOUGH TO ESCAPE....

WHEN SUDDENLY--


YO! I'VE GOT WINGS!

FOLLOWED BY THE WORST CASE OF SOUR STOMACH I'VE EVER HAD!

I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT WAS GONNA DO ME IN FIRST-- THE INDIGESTION OR THE PISSED-OFF BUZZING SWARM NIPPING AT MY CHITINOUS BUTT.

ALL IN A DAY'S WORK, EH?






ONCE UP ON THE HIVE-WORLD'S SURFACE,  
IT WAS ONLY A SHORT FLAP TO MY NEXT  
DESTINATION-- THE HUGE PLANET LOOMING  
OVER ME THAT SERVED AS THE BUGS'  
ENTRY-PORT TO THE INTERZONE.

AS I USED MY WINGS MORE, AND GOT  
USED TO 'EM, I SAW HOW-- IF I SOMEHOW  
GOT STUCK IN THIS BUG FORM-- I COULD  
GROW QUITE FOND OF THE THINGS. IT MAKES  
FLEEING A DEATH-HUNGRY MOB SO MUCH  
EASIER, AND GOD KNOWS I'D BEEN DOING  
A LOT OF THAT!

ESCAPE WAS AT HAND....





JUST IN TIME -- A CROWD OF INTERZONE-  
BOUND FUN-SEEKERS TO LOSE MYSELF IN.  
YEAH, SO THEY WEREN'T A PARTICULARLY  
ATTRACTIVE BUNCH OF BEINGS, BUT--  
HEY-- WAS I COMPLAINING? IT WAS  
CAMOUFLAGE I WAS LOOKING FOR,  
NOT AN AESTHETICALLY PLEASING LIFE-PAL.

THERE WAS PLENTY OF TIME FOR  
THAT PARTICULARLY DEPRESSING  
ACTIVITY LATER ON....

RIGHT NOW, JUST A COUPLE OF  
SHORT STEPS SEPARATED ME FROM  
EITHER A CRUSHED-BUG FUTURE, OR  
THE MUCH MORE PREFERABLE ONE AS  
HAPPIER-THAN-SHIT, JOB-WELL-DONE,  
BACK-IN-FLEXIBLE-FLESH SHELDON.

MY DOGGED PURSUERS APPEARED  
TO HAVE GOTTEN LOST IN THE  
SHUFFLE. SWELL. I WAS BEGINNING  
TO SMELL THE INTERZONE'S WONDERFUL  
FART-CLOUD ATMOSPHERE-- ONE SO  
TASTY YOU HAD TO WEAR AN AIRTIGHT  
MASK TO KEEP IT OUT OF YOUR MOUTH.

LIKE DOROTHY SAID, "THERE'S NO  
PLACE LIKE HOME" EH?



GOT THROUGH THE GATES WITH NO PROBLEM,  
AND DUCKED INTO THE FIRST UNOCCUPIED  
ALLEY I COULD FIND. THE DRONE-BOYS WERE  
STILL OUT THERE LOOKING FOR ME, SO I  
FIGURED THE TIME WAS RIGHT FOR A LITTLE  
CHANGE OF APPEARANCE.

BUT THE STUFF IN MY STOMACH  
HAD OTHER IDEAS.

EVEN THOUGH MY ABDOMEN  
ALREADY FELT SWOLLEN TO ITS  
INFLEXIBLE SKIN'S STRETCHED-  
OUT LIMITS, IT KEPT GETTING  
BIGGER.

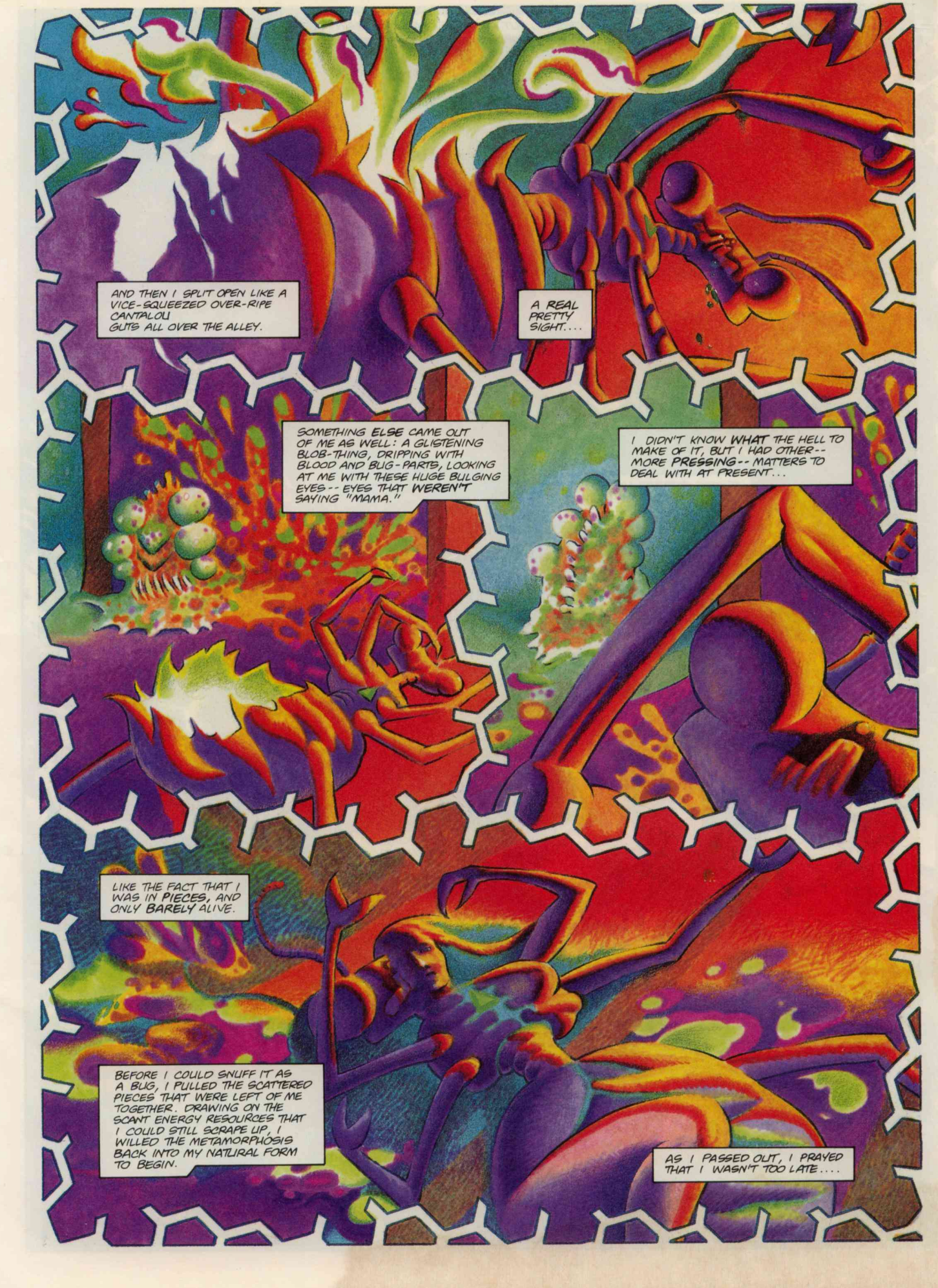
SCREEEEEEEE!

IT WAS HURTING LIKE HELL--  
AND PUFFED-UP ENOUGH TO BURST.

THAT'S WHEN THE  
EXO-SKELETON  
STARTED TO CRACK.







AND THEN I SPLIT OPEN LIKE A  
VICE-SQUEEZED OVER-RIPE  
CANTALOU  
GUTS ALL OVER THE ALLEY.

A REAL  
PRETTY  
SIGHT....

SOMETHING ELSE CAME OUT  
OF ME AS WELL: A GLISTENING  
BLOB-THING, DRIPPING WITH  
BLOOD AND BUG-PARTS, LOOKING  
AT ME WITH THESE HUGE BULGING  
EYES-- EYES THAT WEREN'T  
SAYING "MAMA."


I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT THE HELL TO  
MAKE OF IT, BUT I HAD OTHER--  
MORE PRESSING-- MATTERS TO  
DEAL WITH AT PRESENT...

LIKE THE FACT THAT I  
WAS IN PIECES, AND  
ONLY BARELY ALIVE.


BEFORE I COULD SNUFF IT AS  
A BUG, I PULLED THE SCATTERED  
PIECES THAT WERE LEFT OF ME  
TOGETHER. DRAWING ON THE  
SCANT ENERGY RESOURCES THAT  
I COULD STILL SCRAPE UP, I  
WILLED THE METAMORPHOSIS  
BACK INTO MY NATURAL FORM  
TO BEGIN.

AS I PASSED OUT, I PRAYED  
THAT I WASN'T TOO LATE....





I STILL FELT LIKE SHIT WHEN I WOKE UP, BUT AT LEAST I WAS ME AGAIN.




IT TOOK A REALLY LONG TIME FOR ME TO COME AROUND...

EVERYTHING CAME INTO FOCUS SLOWLY ... I LOOKED AROUND FOR THE BLOB. IT WAS GONE. BUT IT'D LEFT ITS MARK...

IT WAS CARNAGE LIKE I'D NEVER SEEN. LIKE NOBODY'D EVER SEEN, I SUSPECTED.

SUDDENLY, IT ALL BECAME CLEAR TO ME, JUMPING FULLY FORMED INTO MY FOREBRAIN. FINALLY I KNEW WHAT THE SCORE WAS -- FINALLY.

I HAD BEEN TAKEN FOR A SUCKER, ALL RIGHT. IN A BIG WAY.



The woman is sitting on a large, dark, metallic piece of wreckage. She is looking down at a city that has been completely destroyed. The city is covered in a thick layer of green and yellow sludge or smoke. The sky is a deep blue. The overall scene is one of utter devastation.



THE BIG REVELATION? THE BLOB-THING THAT I'D JUST GIVEN BIRTH TO WAS-- DEAD OBVIOUS TO ME NOW-- A PIECE OF KILLER BIOTECH. THAT "LIFE-PROLONGING" JIVE THE DIRECTOR HAD HANDED ME WAS ONE HUGE FREIGHTER-LOAD OF BULLSHIT, CALCULATED TO INSURE MY EAGER COOPERATION. YEAH, IT WAS ALL REAL CLEAR TO ME NOW. I HAD BEEN PLAYED FOR A PRIME SUCKER-- MANIPULATED SO THAT I WOULD SURREPTITIOUSLY ASSEMBLE A LIVING WEAPON THAT THE CORPORATE WARLORDS OF COCA-FARBEN DIDN'T WANT TO BE OFFICIALLY ASSOCIATED WITH. ME AND MY WONDERFUL "TALENT" CAME MADE-TO-ORDER FOR THEIR NEEDS. ALL THEY HAD TO DO WAS PUSH MY BUTTONS-- WERE MY WEAKNESSES REALLY THAT OBVIOUS?-- AND I WAS OFF AND RUNNING.

THAT WAS SOME PRETTY TERRIBLE SHIT-- I WAS HORRIFIED, BUT I COULD DEAL WITH IT.

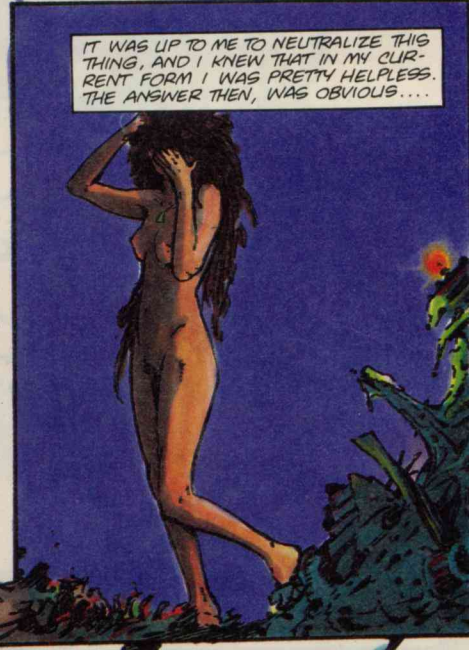
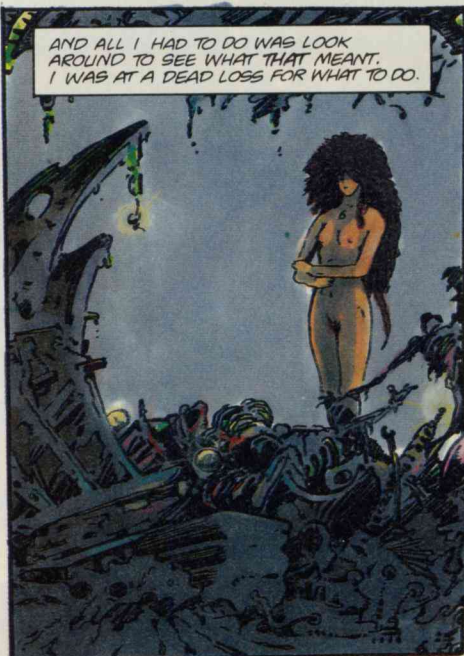
WHAT REALLY BURNED MY ASS ABOUT THIS WAS THAT I'D JUST LOOSED THE FUCKING THING ON THE INTERZONE. IT WAS A SENTIENT VECTOR OF DESTRUCTION, TOTALLY OUT OF ANYONE'S CONTROL.



AND ALL I HAD TO DO WAS LOOK AROUND TO SEE WHAT THAT MEANT. I WAS AT A DEAD LOSS FOR WHAT TO DO.

IT TOOK ME A FEW SECONDS TO GET OVER MY INITIAL SHOCK AND OUTRAGE... AND TO SHIFT THE BRUNT OF MY ANGER AWAY FROM ITS USUAL PRIMARY TARGET-- MYSELF (A BAD HABIT I'VE YET TO BREAK)-- AND TOWARD THE BASTARDS WHO REALLY DESERVED IT. ONCE I DID THAT, THE PIECES STARTED COMING TOGETHER IN MY HEAD. PRETTY SOON, I KNEW WHAT I HAD TO DO.

IT WAS UP TO ME TO NEUTRALIZE THIS THING, AND I KNEW THAT IN MY CURRENT FORM I WAS PRETTY HELPLESS. THE ANSWER THEN, WAS OBVIOUS....



IT TAKES A BLOB TO CATCH A BLOB, EH?



I GOT DOWN TO BUSINESS....



YO-HO-HO, A  
BLOBBING WE  
WILL GO....

ORIENTATION TO THIS--ER, UNUSUAL BODY-FORM  
TOOK SOME TIME. I HAD TO GET USED TO MY RATHER  
FLIMSY BLOB-BRAIN -- WHICH ITSELF REQUIRED A  
COUPLE OF SECONDS TO FIND--AND THE WACKY  
INPUT IT RECEIVED FROM A CONSTANTLY CHANGING  
CONFIGURATION OF SENSORY ORGANS.

I MEAN,  
TALK ABOUT  
ROVING EYES!

BUT ONCE I GOT THAT TRICK DOWN, BEING A  
BLOB WAS A SNAP.

IN FACT, IT WOULD'VE  
BEEN FUN IF NOT FOR  
THE UNSIGHTLY AND  
UNSANITARY SLIME-  
TRAIL MY BIG GELATI-  
NOUS BODY LEFT  
BEHIND IT, WHICH  
ACTUALLY TURNED OUT  
TO BE RATHER HANDY,  
AS IT GAVE ME A REAL  
OBVIOUS --IF SMELLY--  
WAY TO TRACK MY  
QUARRY.

FOLLOW THAT JELLY-SMEAR!

FIGURES THE GUY WOULD HEAD  
STRAIGHT FOR THE NEAREST SEWER!

WELL, I GUESS IT'S  
"WHEN IN ROME" TIME....

YOW! THAT  
TICKLES!



THE INTERZONE, BEING A PRODIGIOUS WASTE-PRODUCING ENTITY, HAS AN EXTENSIVE GARBAGE DISPOSAL/TREATMENT/RECYCLING SYSTEM. HUGE SEWER-LIKE DUCTS HONEY-COMB THE MEGA-STRUCTURE, SUCKING IN ALL THE VARIOUS UNDESIRABLE SUBSTANCES AND DISCARDED OBJECTS YOUR TYPICAL GALAXY. SPANNING POST-INDUSTRIAL CIVILIZATION SPEWS OUT, TRANSPORTING IT ALL TO A VAST CENTRAL PROCESSING FACILITY.

MY BLOB-BABY WAS MAKING ITS WAY THROUGH THE SEWERS, IN A SEEMINGLY RANDOM FASHION, BUT DEFINITELY BOUND FOR THE INTERZONE'S GREAT COSMIC CESSPOOL --THE ULTIMATE DESTINATION FOR EVERYTHING IN THIS HELL-ON-EARTH.



THE TRAIL WAS LAID OUT CLEARLY BEFORE ME.

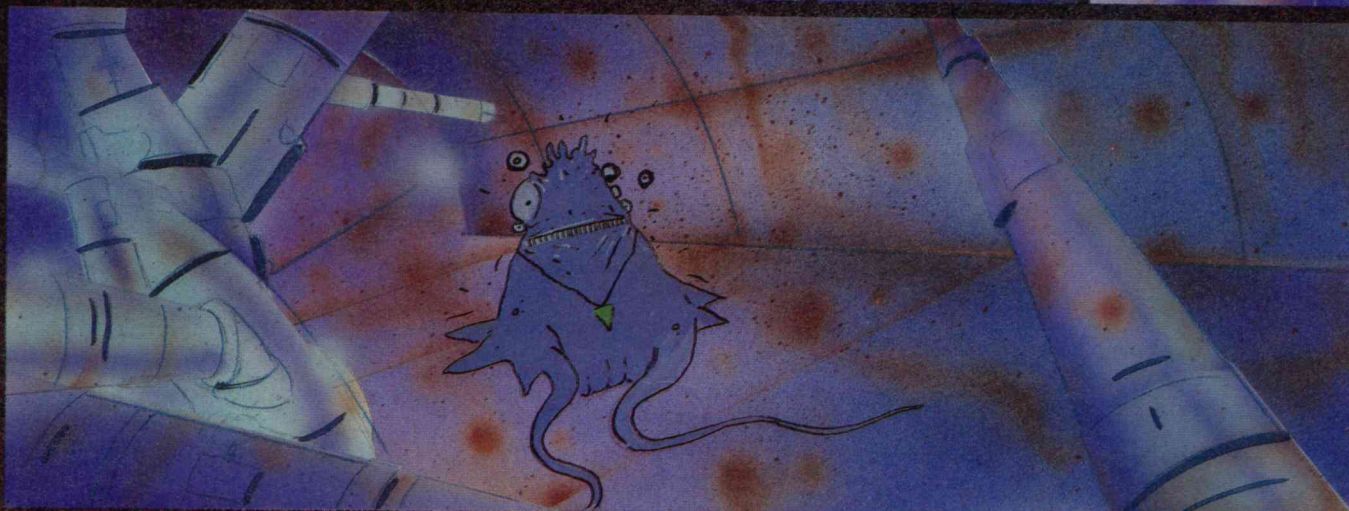
I FOLLOWED IT.



THE FACILITY'S NERVE CENTER  
STOOD BEFORE ME. SUDDENLY,  
I REALIZED THE CONCEPTUAL  
POTTY-JOKE SOME SMART-  
ASSSED DESIGNER HAD PER-  
PETRATED.

YUK-YUK.

SO MUCH FOR  
THAT. I HEADED  
INSIDE.

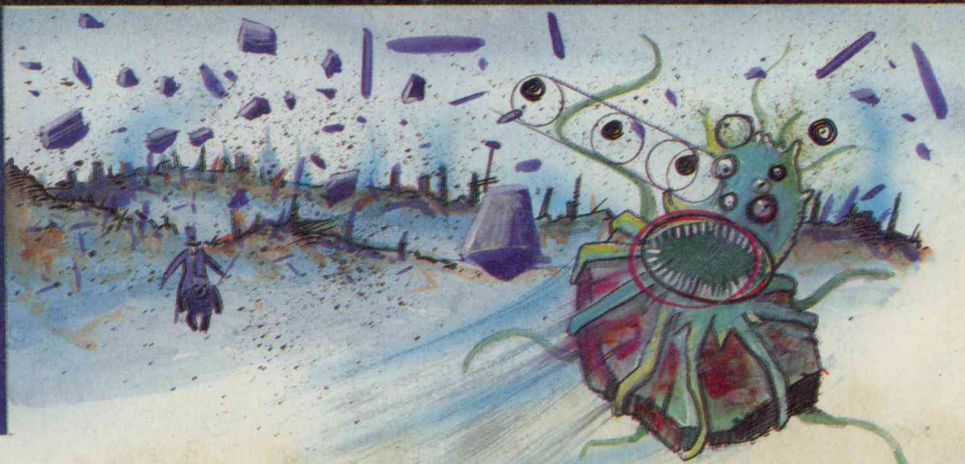
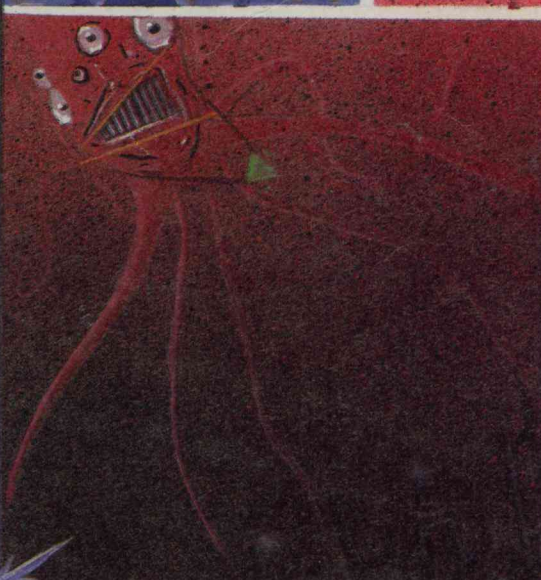


AND BREACHED THE  
CORE OF THE UNIVERSAL  
COLLECTION UNIT.


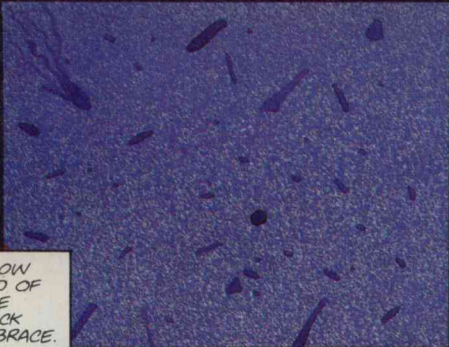





THE INTERZONE'S  
JUNKYARD--THE  
HOLE: WHERE  
TECHNO-VULTURES  
COME TO FEED ON  
A GLUTTONOUS  
SOCIETY'S RICH  
CAST-OFFS; A  
SCRAP-HEAP  
SHANTY-TOWN  
OF PLANETARY  
PROPORTIONS,  
HOME TO  
SCAVENGING  
MILLIONS  
SWARMING LIKE  
SO MANY  
COCKROACHES  
ON A PILE OF  
MEAL-CRUMBS.





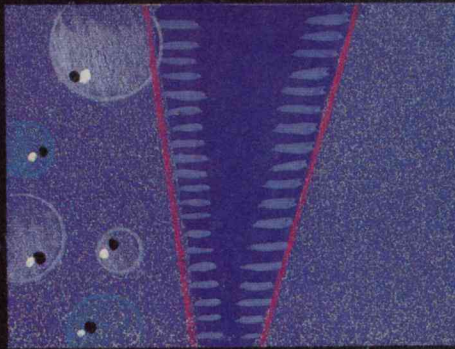


INSIDE THE SUN-SIZED HOLLOW  
SPHERE IS A VAST SARGASSO OF  
TRASH, SPIRALLING INTO THE  
VORTEX OBLIVION OF A BLACK  
HOLE'S GRAVITATIONAL EMBRACE.

HERE, DURING THE SLOW TUMBLE  
INTO THE MAW OF THE ULTIMATE  
TRASH COMPACTOR, ALL SOLID  
OBJECTS ARE STRIPPED OF ANY  
USABLE PARTS BY THE HOLE'S  
HORDE OF PIRANHA-LIKE  
INHABITANTS.

AND HERE, TOO, WAS MY GUY--  
SITTING STATIONARY OUT THERE  
ON THE RIVER OF REFUSE, LIKE  
SOME ERRANT KID WAITING TO BE  
SCOOPED UP BY HIS WORRIED  
MOTHER.





BUT BASICALLY, THE THING  
DID NOTHING FOR MY MA-  
TERNAL INSTINCTS. I WANTED  
HIM FOR QUITE ANOTHER  
REASON. . . .



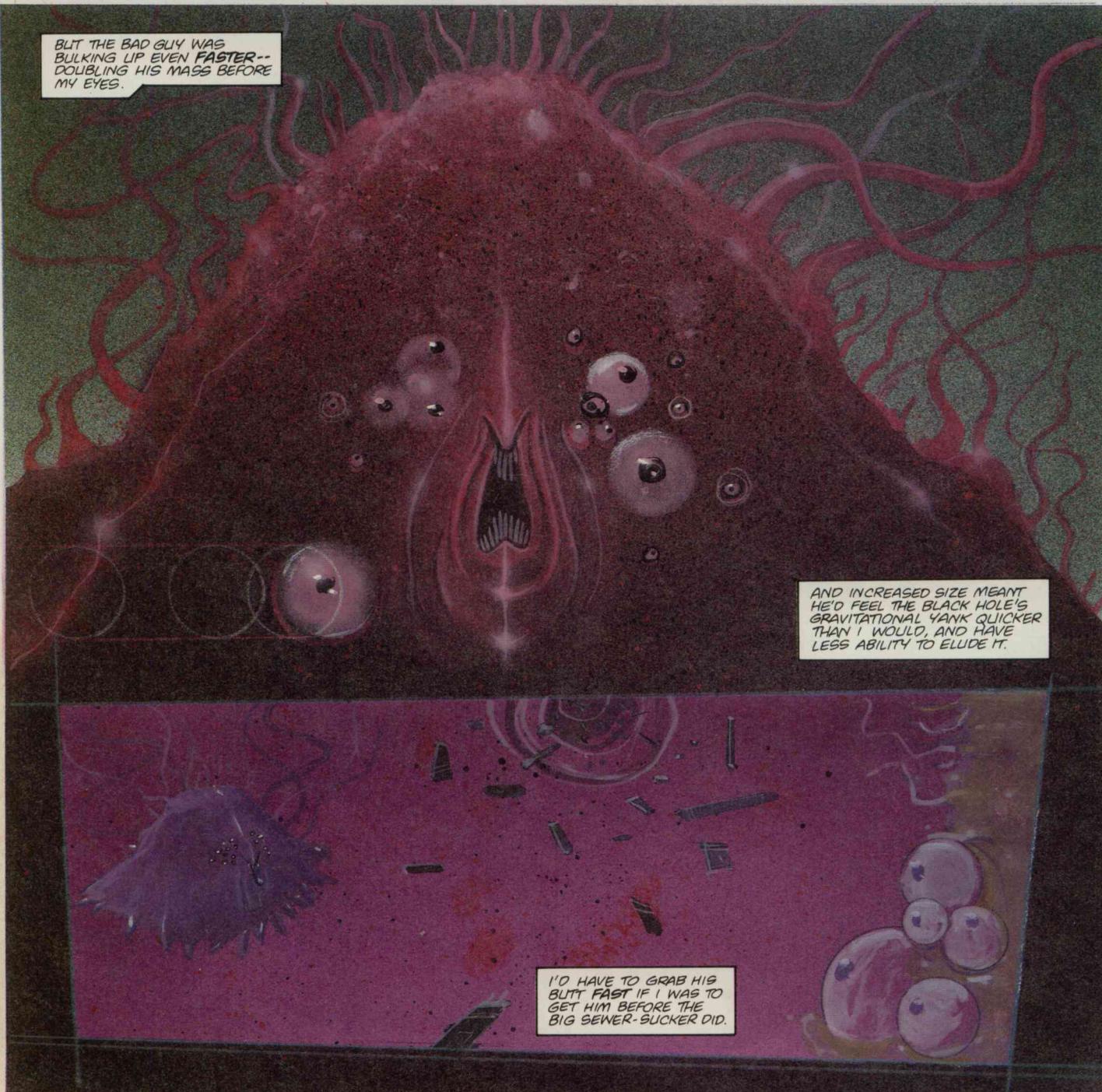


I MOVED IN FOR THE SNATCH--

--HOPPING FROM ONE FLOATING CHUNK OF DEBRIS TO ANOTHER.

EACH MOVE FED ME A BIT, WHICH ADDED TO MY BULK.

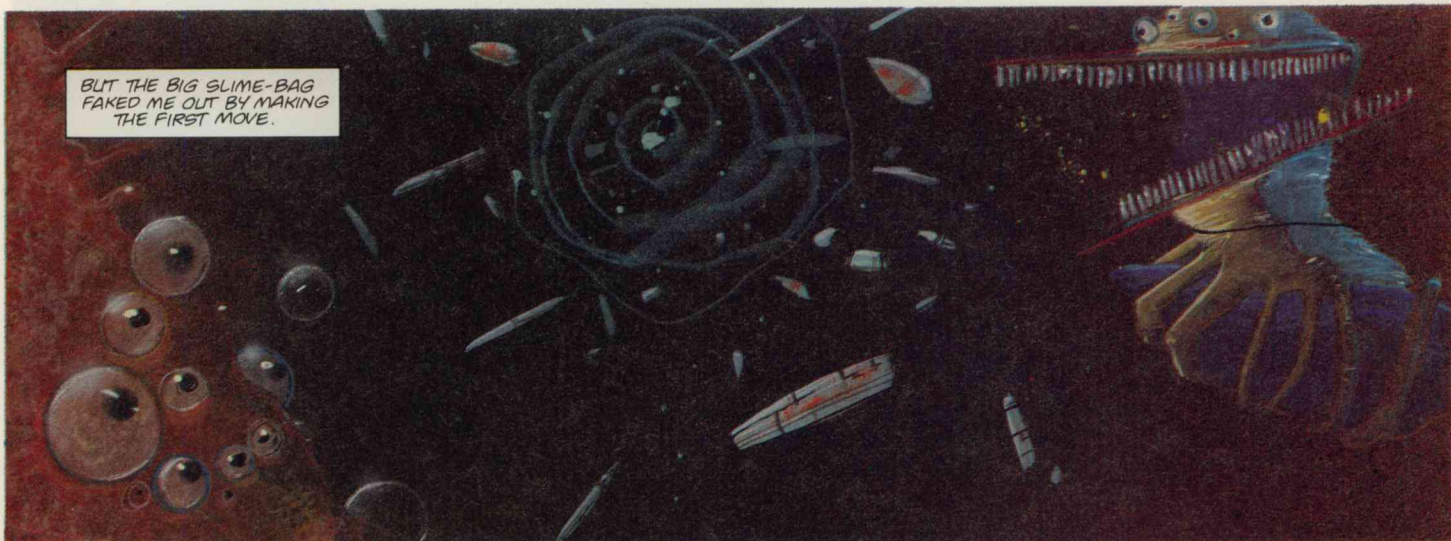
BUT THE BAD GUY WAS BULKING UP EVEN **FASTER**-- DOUBLING HIS MASS BEFORE MY EYES.



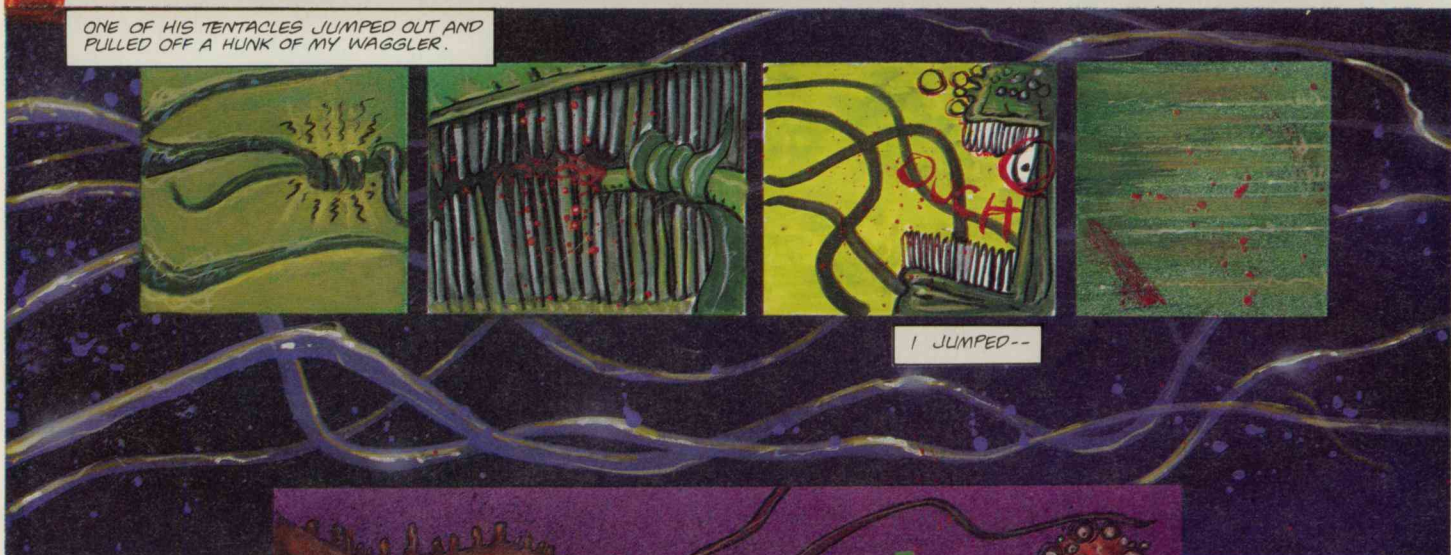
AND INCREASED SIZE MEANT HE'D FEEL THE BLACK HOLE'S GRAVITATIONAL YANK QUICKER THAN I WOULD, AND HAVE LESS ABILITY TO ELUDE IT.

I'D HAVE TO GRAB HIS BUTT FAST IF I WAS TO GET HIM BEFORE THE BIG SEWER-SUCKER DID.





BUT THE BIG SLIME-BAG  
FAKED ME OUT BY MAKING  
THE FIRST MOVE.



ONE OF HIS TENTACLES JUMPED OUT AND  
PULLED OFF A HUNK OF MY WAGGLER.

I JUMPED--



--TRYING TO  
GET AWAY.

HE CAME  
AFTER ME.



BUT HIS BULBOUS BABY-FAT BETRAYED HIM.

THE POOR PIECE OF PROTOPLASM GOT HIS ASS SUCKED UP BY THE BLACK HOLE LIKE SPILLED BLOOD BY A DRACULA SPONGE.

BUT BEFORE HE COULD GET COMPLETELY SWALLOWED, I TOOK MY PIECE OUT OF HIM AND GOBBLED IT. IT WOULD BE SUFFICIENT FOR WHAT I HAD IN MIND.

I WATCHED THE FOUL THING DISAPPEAR.

IT WAS THE SWELLEST THING I'D SEEN IN WEEKS.



SO NOW THAT THAT BIT OF  
UGLINESS WAS TAKEN CARE OF...

...AND MY CRACKERJACKS  
PRIZE WAS STOWED SAFELY  
INSIDE ME, I AMOEBAED  
THROUGH THE JUNK-SPRAWL  
TOWARD THE NEAREST EXIT.

MY "ASSIGNMENT"  
MIGHT BE HISTORY,  
BUT I STILL HAD  
ONE TINY BIT OF  
UNFINISHED BUSI-  
NESS LEFT TO  
ATTEND TO....





NOW I WAS  
READY TO TIE  
ALL THIS  
NASTY SHIT  
INTO ONE TIDY  
PACKAGE.



FIRST, BUZZ THE  
DIRECTOR'S  
PRIVATE LINE....

SHELDON HERE, YOUR  
RUTHLESSNESS-- I'VE GOT SOME  
GOOD NEWS FOR BOTH OF US. I'VE  
COMPLETED THE JOB.



WHY, THAT'S  
WONDERFUL  
MSR. SHELDON!

I TRUST THAT THE--  
UH-- PRODUCT IS SAFELY  
CONTAINED INSIDE YOU?



YOU  
BET.

EXCELLENT,  
EXCELLENT!

WELL, DELAY NO FURTHER,  
MY DEAR! I AWAIT YOUR AR-  
RIVAL WITH EAGERNESS!

YOU GOT IT, BIG GUY--  
I'LL BE THERE QUICKER THAN  
IT TAKES YOU TO GET YOUR  
ANNUAL HARD-ON.

JUST MAKE SURE YOU  
DON'T DIE OF EXCITEMENT  
BEFORE I GET THERE....



... 'CAUSE I GOT ALL  
KINDS OF SURPRISES WAITING  
IN MY BULGING BELLY FOR YOU.







COME RIGHT IN, MSR. SHELTON!  
IT'S GOOD TO SEE YOU LOOKING SO  
WELL AFTER SUCH AN ARDUOUS  
ASSIGNMENT. WOULD YOU CARE TO  
JOIN ME IN THE REJUV-BATH? IT'S  
EXTREMELY REFRESHING.

I THINK I MIGHT JUST  
DO THAT, YOUR DECREPTITUDE.  
I COULD USE A LITTLE PICK-  
ME UP RIGHT ABOUT NOW.

WELL, JUST  
REMOVE YOUR  
CLOTHES AND  
STEP RIGHT IN!

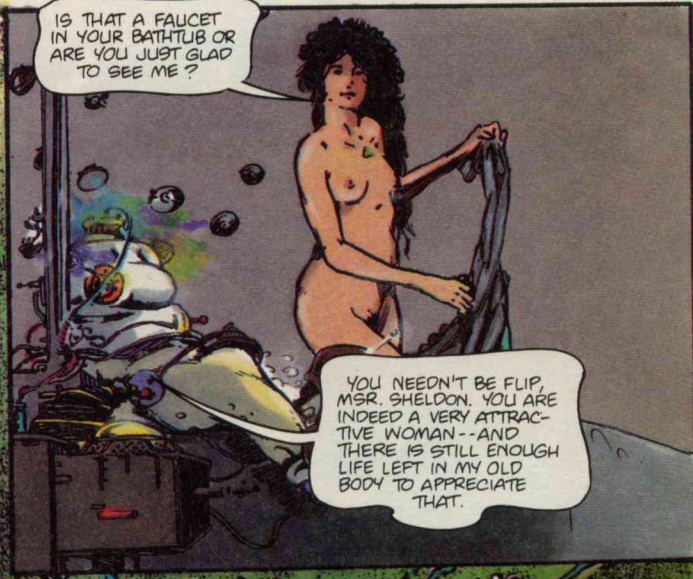
BE WITH YOU IN A  
JIFFY, HOT STUFF.



HOPE THE PIG'S WEARING  
HIS DROOL CUP-- HE'S READY  
TO SLOBBER ALL OVER THE  
PLACE.



THIS IS  
GONNA BE FLIN....



IS THAT A FAUCET  
IN YOUR BATHTUB OR  
ARE YOU JUST GLAD  
TO SEE ME?

YOU NEEDN'T BE FLIP,  
MSR. SHELTON. YOU ARE  
INDEED A VERY ATTRAC-  
TIVE WOMAN--AND  
THERE IS STILL ENOUGH  
LIFE LEFT IN MY OLD  
BODY TO APPRECIATE  
THAT.



WELL, I'VE GOT SOME-  
THING ELSE HERE YOU  
MIGHT APPRECIATE,  
YOUR VIRILENESS....

I HIT MY INTERNAL  
TRIGGER, AND LAUNCHED  
THE MINI-BLOB WEAPON  
STRAIGHT AT THE OLD  
FLICKER'S FACE.

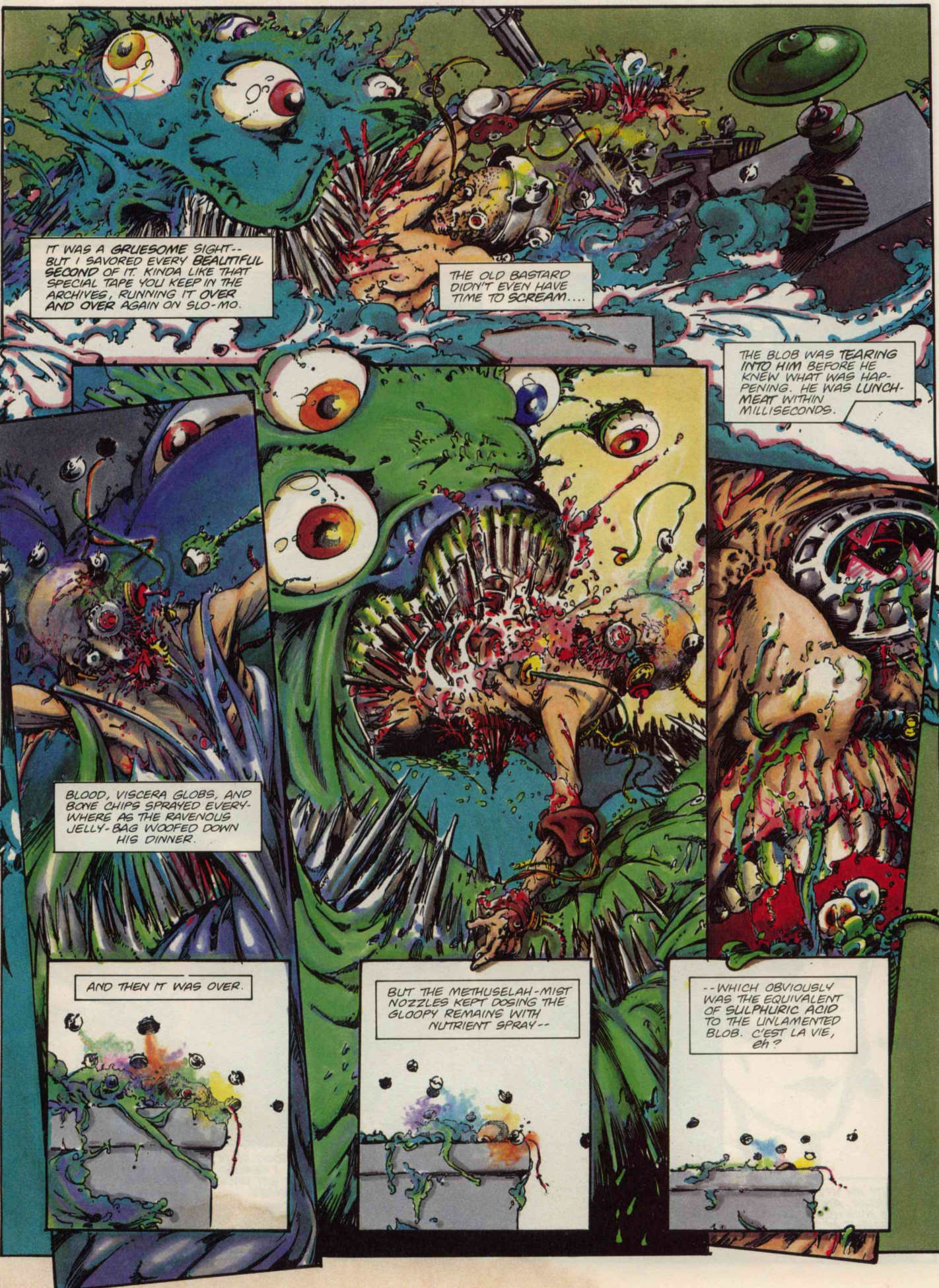


AAAAAAAAA!!!

SCREEEEEE!!!!!!

AS SOON AS IT WAS CLEAR OF  
ME, I SEALED THE EXIT WOUND,  
AND SAT BACK TO WATCH THE  
CARNAGE....





IT WAS A GRUESOME SIGHT--  
BUT I SAVORED EVERY BEAUTIFUL  
SECOND OF IT. KINDA LIKE THAT  
SPECIAL TAPE YOU KEEP IN THE  
ARCHIVES, RUNNING IT OVER  
AND OVER AGAIN ON SLO-MO.

THE OLD BASTARD  
DIDN'T EVEN HAVE  
TIME TO SCREAM....

THE BLOB WAS TEARING  
INTO HIM BEFORE HE  
KNEW WHAT WAS HAP-  
PENING. HE WAS LUNCH-  
MEAT WITHIN  
MILLISECONDS.

BLOOD, VISCERA GLOBS, AND  
BONE CHIPS SPRAYED EVERY-  
WHERE AS THE RAVENOUS  
JELLY-BAG WOOFED DOWN  
HIS DINNER.

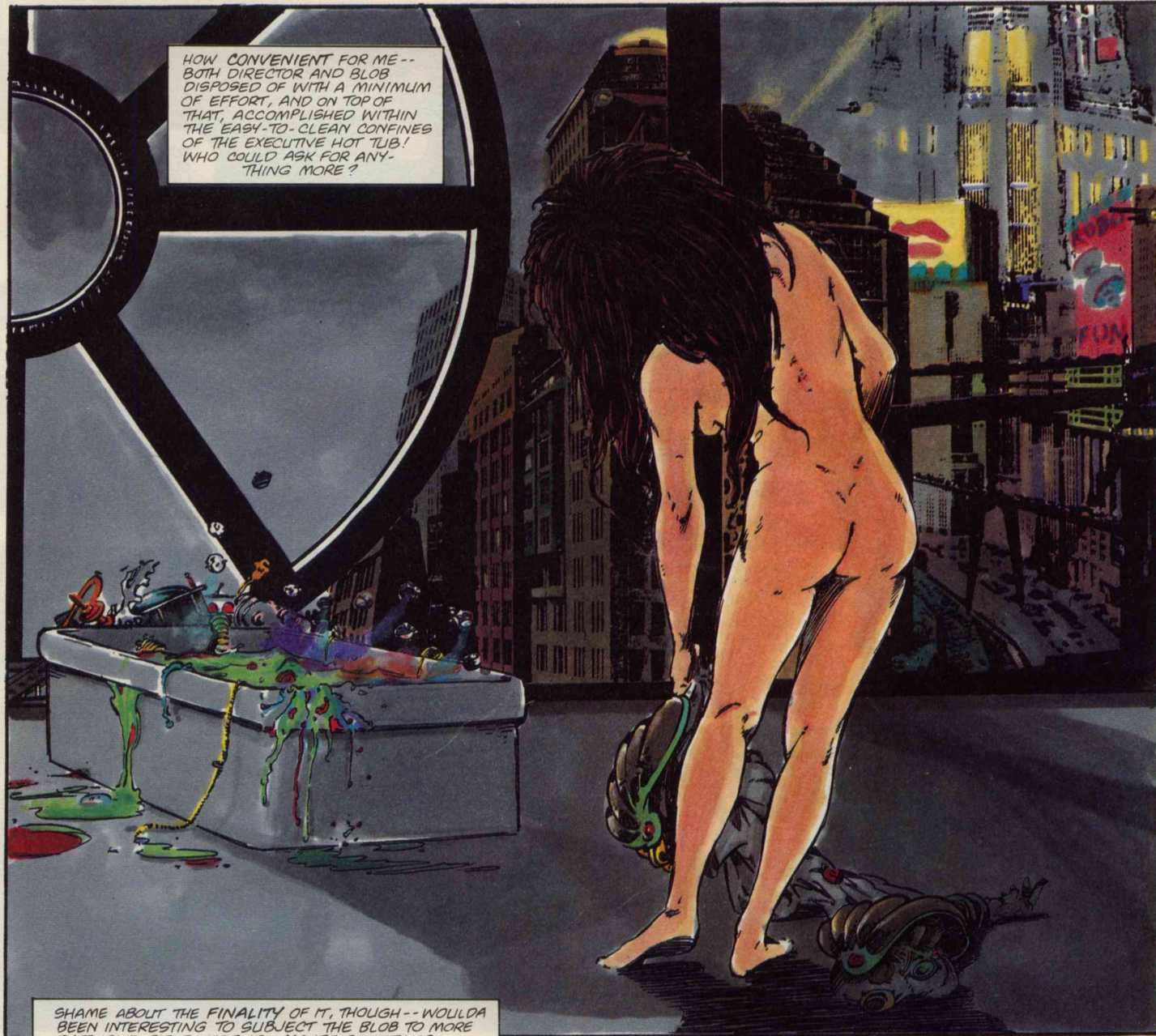
AND THEN IT WAS OVER.

BUT THE METHUSELAH-MIST  
NOZZLES KEPT DOSING THE  
GLOOPY REMAINS WITH  
NUTRIENT SPRAY--

-- WHICH OBVIOUSLY  
WAS THE EQUIVALENT  
OF SULPHURIC ACID  
TO THE UNLAMENTED  
BLOB. C'EST LA VIE,  
EH?



HOW CONVENIENT FOR ME--  
BOTH DIRECTOR AND BLOB  
DISPOSED OF WITH A MINIMUM  
OF EFFORT, AND ON TOP OF  
THAT, ACCOMPLISHED WITHIN  
THE EASY-TO-CLEAN CONFINES  
OF THE EXECUTIVE HOT TUB!  
WHO COULD ASK FOR ANY-  
THING MORE?



SHAME ABOUT THE FINALITY OF IT, THOUGH-- WOULD'VE  
BEEN INTERESTING TO SUBJECT THE BLOB TO MORE  
EXTENSIVE FIELD TESTING. MAYBE SOMETHING  
COULDA BEEN DONE ABOUT ITS UNFORTUNATE ALLER-  
GIC REACTION TO THE METHUSELAH-MIST.

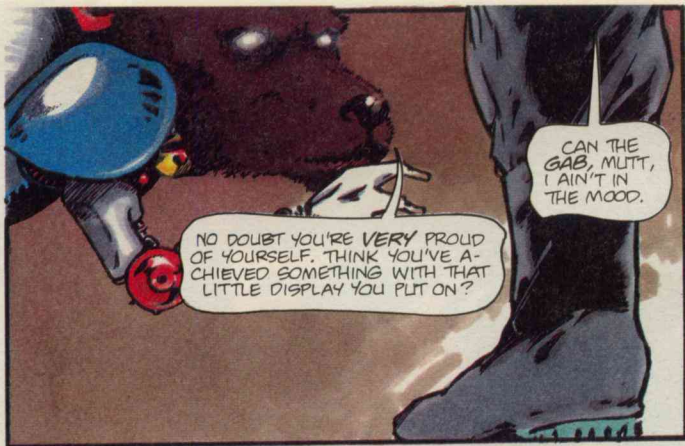


SOME OTHER LIFETIME, I GUESS.  
AND SOME OTHER SUCKER....



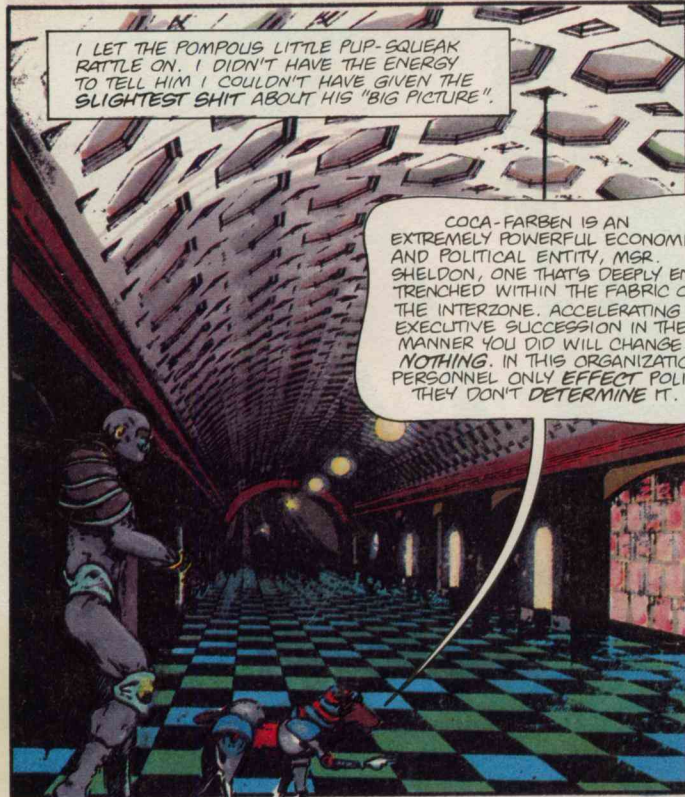
DON'T LOOK  
SO SMUG, MSR.  
SHELDON....





CAN THE  
GAB, MUTT,  
I AIN'T IN  
THE MOOD.

NO DOUBT YOU'RE VERY PROUD  
OF YOURSELF. THINK YOU'VE A-  
CHIEVED SOMETHING WITH THAT  
LITTLE DISPLAY YOU PUT ON?



I LET THE POMPUS LITTLE PUP-SQUEAK  
RATTLE ON. I DIDN'T HAVE THE ENERGY  
TO TELL HIM I COULDN'T HAVE GIVEN THE  
SLIGHTEST SHIT ABOUT HIS "BIG PICTURE."

COCA-FARBEN IS AN  
EXTREMELY POWERFUL ECONOMIC  
AND POLITICAL ENTITY, MSR.  
SHELDON, ONE THAT'S DEEPLY EN-  
TRENCHED WITHIN THE FABRIC OF  
THE INTERZONE. ACCELERATING  
EXECUTIVE SUCCESSION IN THE  
MANNER YOU DID WILL CHANGE  
NOTHING. IN THIS ORGANIZATION,  
PERSONNEL ONLY EFFECT POLICY,  
THEY DON'T DETERMINE IT.



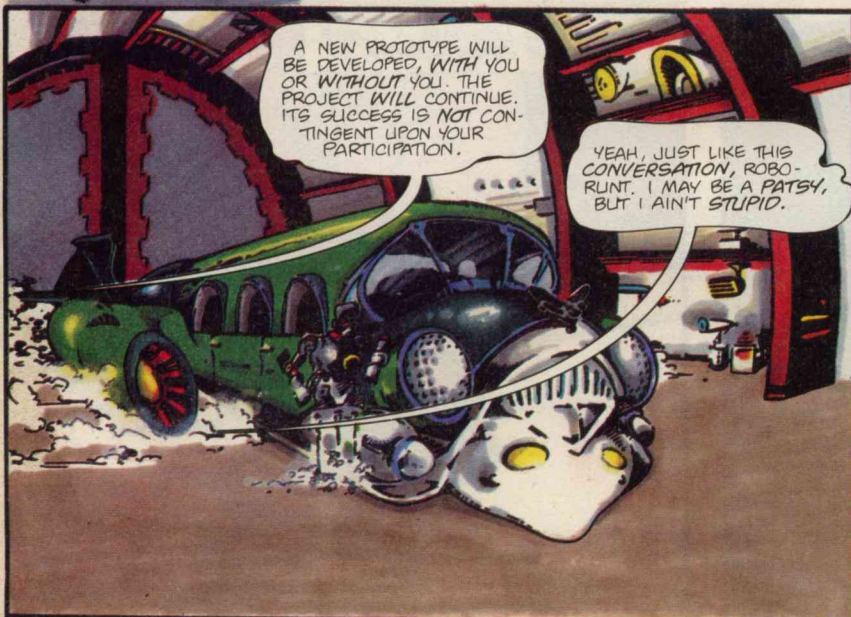
YOU MAY BE STROLLING  
OUT OF HERE WITH YOUR  
LIFE, MY ARROGANT HU-  
MAN FRIEND, BUT DON'T  
FLATTER YOURSELF BY  
THINKING THAT YOUR  
ELIMINATION OF ONE AGING  
FIGUREHEAD WILL HAVE  
ANY EFFECT ON THE BIG  
PICTURE.

YOU CAN  
TAKE MY WORD  
FOR IT--IT  
WON'T.



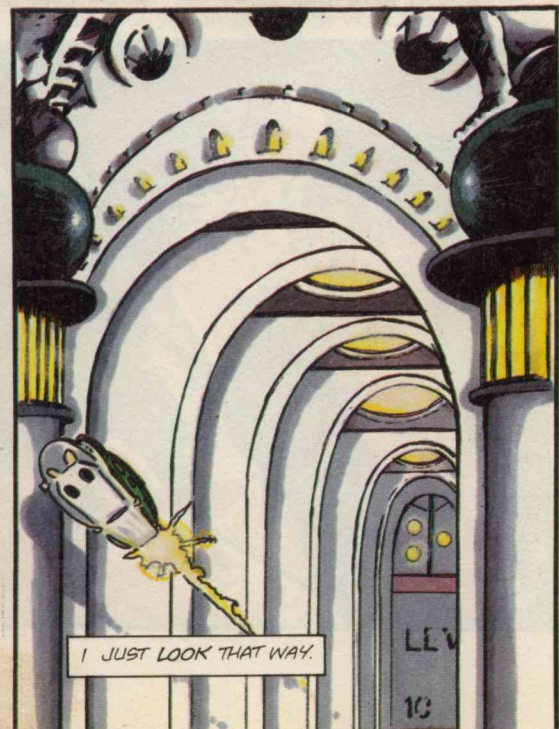
THE LITTLE HYDRANT-HOSER WAS  
ON A ROLL. I LET 'IM GO. SOONER  
OR LATER HE'D RUN OUT OF JUICE.

YES, YOU MAY HAVE  
PROMPTED ONE EARLY  
RETIREMENT AND REMOVED  
A PRODUCT PROTOTYPE FROM  
PRE-MARKET TESTING-- BUT  
THAT IS ONLY A MERE SPEED-  
BUMP ON THE HIGHWAY OF  
COCA-FARBEN'S CORPORATE  
MOMENTUM.



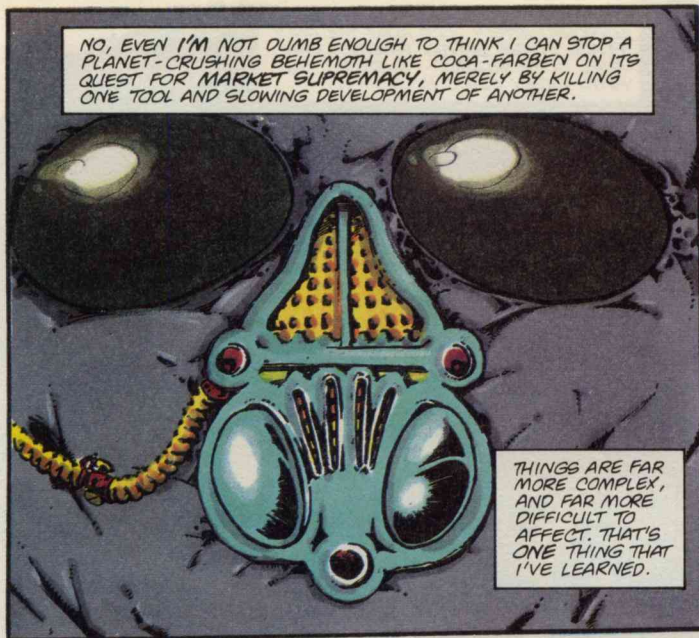
A NEW PROTOTYPE WILL  
BE DEVELOPED, WITH YOU  
OR WITHOUT YOU. THE  
PROJECT WILL CONTINUE.  
ITS SUCCESS IS NOT CON-  
TINGENT UPON YOUR  
PARTICIPATION.

YEAH, JUST LIKE THIS  
CONVERSATION, ROBO-  
RUNT. I MAY BE A PATSY,  
BUT I AIN'T STUPID.



I JUST LOOK THAT WAY.





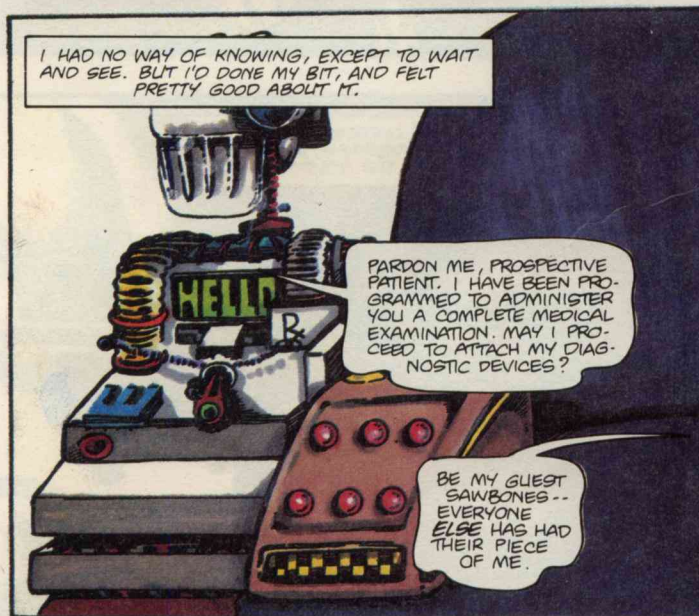
NO, EVEN I'M NOT DUMB ENOUGH TO THINK I CAN STOP A PLANET-CRUSHING BEHEMOTH LIKE COCA-FARBEN ON ITS QUEST FOR MARKET SUPREMACY, MERELY BY KILLING ONE TOOL AND SLOWING DEVELOPMENT OF ANOTHER.

THINGS ARE FAR MORE COMPLEX, AND FAR MORE DIFFICULT TO AFFECT. THAT'S ONE THING THAT I'VE LEARNED.



BUT I'VE ALSO LEARNED THAT ONE PERSON MAKING SEEMINGLY FUTILE EFFORTS CAN CHANGE SOME THINGS--SOMETIMES ONLY INFINITESIMALLY, SOMETIMES TREMENDOUSLY. AND YOU CAN NEVER KNOW BEFOREHAND WHAT KIND OF AN EFFECT YOU MIGHT HAVE.

WHICH MEANS, THERE'S NO EXCUSE FOR NOT TRYING. WHO KNOWS WHAT WOULD HAPPEN AS A RESULT OF WHAT I DID TODAY? MAYBE COCA-FARBEN'S SENTIENT WEAPON PROJECT WILL DIE--MAYBE THE WHOLE FUCKING COMPANY WILL CRUMBLE.



I HAD NO WAY OF KNOWING, EXCEPT TO WAIT AND SEE. BUT I'D DONE MY BIT, AND FELT PRETTY GOOD ABOUT IT.

PARDON ME, PROSPECTIVE PATIENT. I HAVE BEEN PROGRAMMED TO ADMINISTER YOU A COMPLETE MEDICAL EXAMINATION. MAY I PROCEED TO ATTACH MY DIAGNOSTIC DEVICES?

BE MY GUEST SAWBONES--EVERYONE ELSE HAS HAD THEIR PIECE OF ME.



WHILE THE DOC-BOT DID HIS STUFF, I MULLED OVER MY FUTURE PROSPECTS. WHICH OF COURSE, AMOUNTED TO ZILCH. CONSIDERING WHAT I'D BEEN THROUGH, I FELT REMARKABLY GOOD--PHYSICALLY, THAT IS. BUT MENTALLY? QUITE ANOTHER KETTLE OF FISH. I DIDN'T THINK I'D BE DOING ANY MORE CHANGE-FOR-HIRE GIGS, THAT'S FOR SURE. TIME TO PURSUE SOMETHING A LITTLE MORE SPIRITUALLY REWARDING.



WELL, HUMAN FEMALE PATIENT, I AM QUITE HAPPY TO INFORM YOU THAT YOU ARE IN EXCELLENT PHYSICAL CONDITION. ADDITIONALLY--AND BEYOND MY LIMITED NEURAL CAPACITY TO EXPLAIN OR UNDERSTAND--YOU HAVE UNDERGONE A SUBSTANTIAL SYSTEMIC CHEMICAL CHANGE SOMETIME SINCE YOUR LAST RECORDED MEDICAL EXAMINATION.

WHAT'S THAT SUPPOSED TO MEAN?

IT MEANS, MADAM, THAT CERTAIN CELLULAR IDIOSYNCRASIES INDICATED BY PREVIOUS DIAGNOSTIC DATA HAVE BEEN CORRECTED.

WHAT? YOU MEAN I'M CURED--I'M NORMAL?

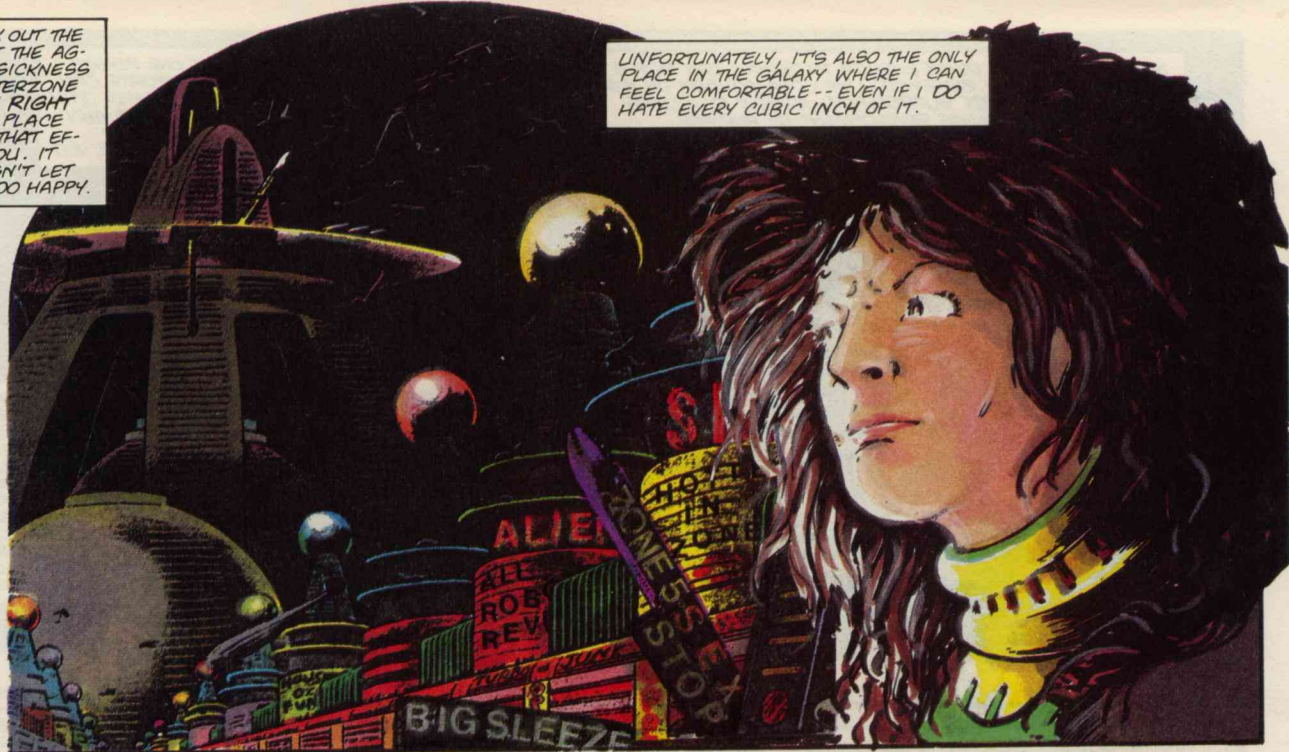
SO THE DATA WOULD INDICATE.

I WAS STUNNED. AFTER THE INITIAL NUMBNESS, I FELT A GROWING, WARMING RELIEF. BEFORE I KNEW IT, I WAS GRINNING LIKE A SHITHEAD. MAYBE THINGS WEREN'T SO BAD AFTER ALL.



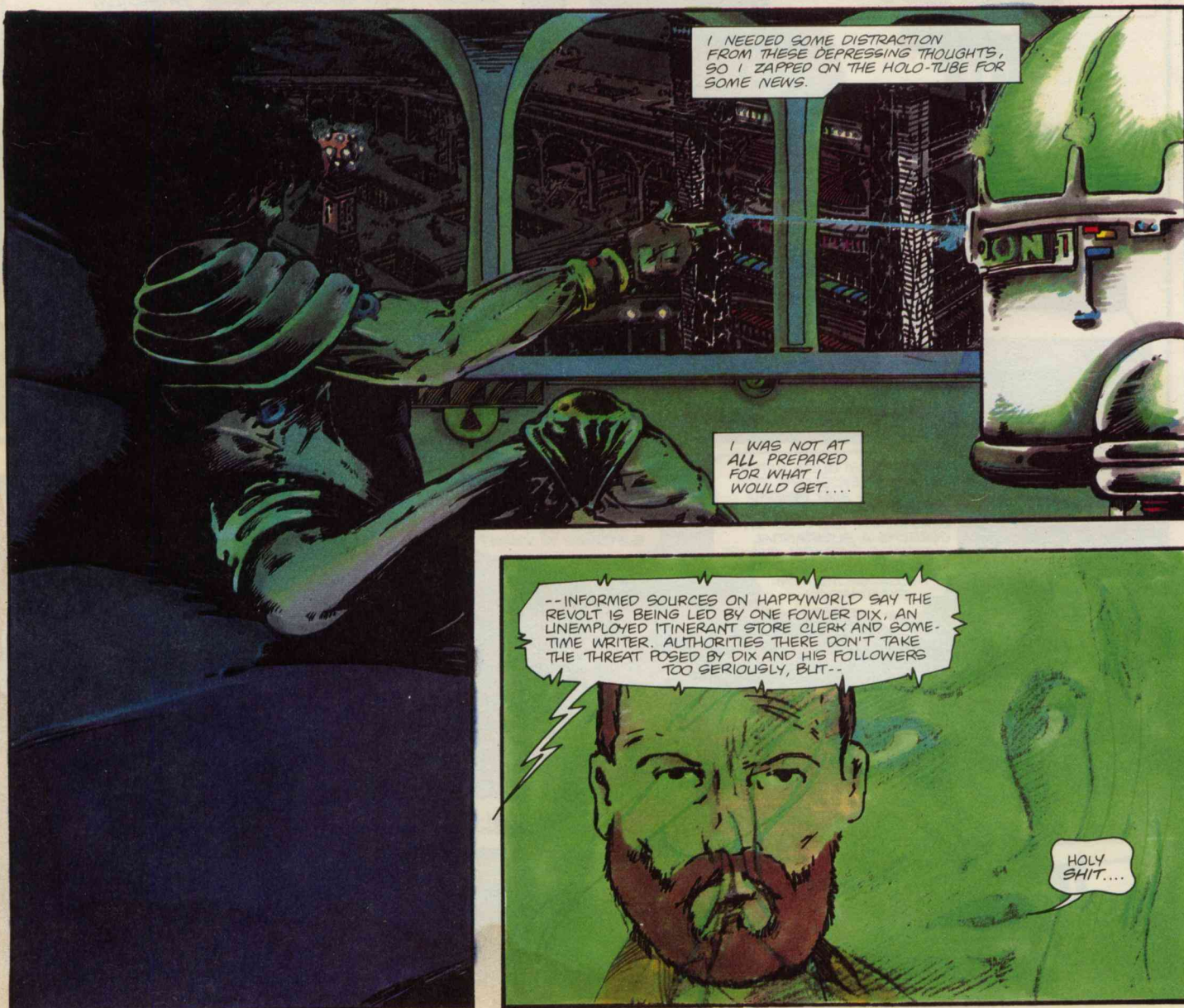
BUT A LOOK OUT THE WINDOW AT THE AGGRESSIVE SICKNESS OF THE INTERZONE COOLED ME RIGHT DOWN. THE PLACE CAN HAVE THAT EFFECT ON YOU. IT JUST DOESN'T LET YOU GET TOO HAPPY.

UNFORTUNATELY, IT'S ALSO THE ONLY PLACE IN THE GALAXY WHERE I CAN FEEL COMFORTABLE -- EVEN IF I DO HATE EVERY CUBIC INCH OF IT.



I NEEDED SOME DISTRACTION FROM THESE DEPRESSING THOUGHTS, SO I ZAPPED ON THE HOLO-TUBE FOR SOME NEWS.

I WAS NOT AT ALL PREPARED FOR WHAT I WOULD GET...



--INFORMED SOURCES ON HAPPYWORLD SAY THE REVOLT IS BEING LED BY ONE FOWLER DIX, AN UNEMPLOYED ITINERANT STORE CLERK AND SOME-TIME WRITER. AUTHORITIES THERE DON'T TAKE THE THREAT POSED BY DIX AND HIS FOLLOWERS TOO SERIOUSLY, BLIT--

HOLY SHIT....



# S NEWS UPDA RIOTING • EA

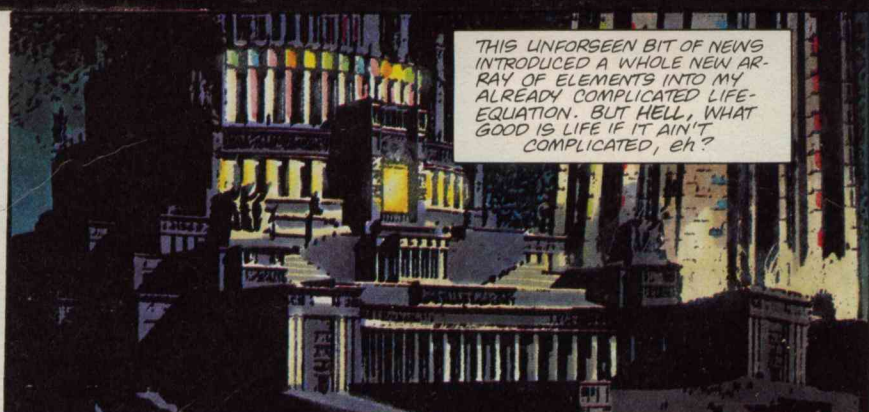


--THERE HAVE BEEN REPORTS OF WIDE-SPREAD RIOTING, STRIKES, AND CALLS FOR NEW, UNREGULATED ELECTIONS. HAPPYWORLD AUTHORITIES WOULDN'T COMMENT ON WHAT IT WAS THAT TRIGGERED THE UNREST, BUT UNCONFIRMED REPORTS INDICATE REVELATIONS OF A MULTI-PLANET SCANDAL THAT THREATENS TO TOPPLE THE PREVIOUSLY SECURE HAPPY-WORLD ADMINISTRATION.

FOWLER DIX HIMSELF REMAINS UNAVAILABLE TO ZONE-NET CAMERAS, THOUGH WE DO EXPECT TO HAVE AN INTERVIEW WITH THE INSURGENT LEADER FOR YOU SHORTLY. STAY TUNED FOR:-



FOWLER! I CAN'T BELIEVE IT! HE'S USING WHAT WE FOUND AT THAT FACTORY TO GET RID OF THE BIG GUY! MAYBE HE'S NOT SUCH A WIMPY BASTARD AFTER ALL....

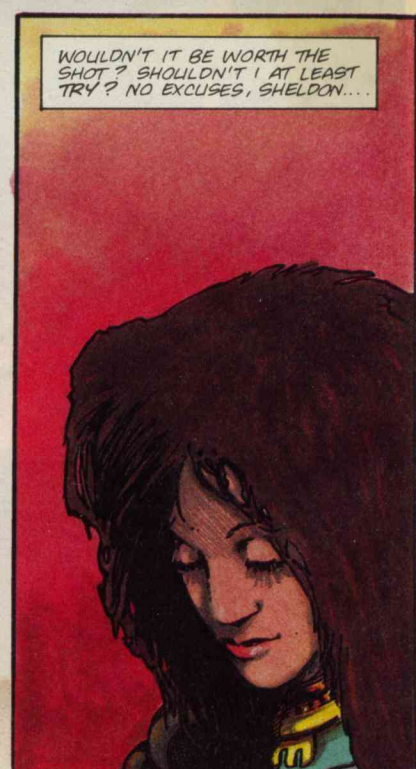


THIS UNFORSEEN BIT OF NEWS INTRODUCED A WHOLE NEW ARRAY OF ELEMENTS INTO MY ALREADY COMPLICATED LIFE-EQUATION. BUT HELL, WHAT GOOD IS LIFE IF IT AIN'T COMPLICATED, EH?




HADN'T I JUST-- NOT MINUTES EARLIER-- BEEN CONTEMPLATING THE GRIM PROSPECTS OF AN EMPTY, JOYLESS FUTURE? WAS THIS NOT THE ANSWER TO MY WHINING? I'D NEVER HELPED TOPPLE A HATEFUL GOVERNMENT BEFORE-- IT SOUNDED LIKE IT COULD BE FUN, AND JUST THE SPIRITUALLY REWARDING SORT OF THING I NEEDED.

AND IF, AT THE SAME TIME, SOMETHING EVEN MORE SPIRITUALLY REWARDING SHOULD DEVELOP BETWEEN ME AND FOWLER....



WOULDN'T IT BE WORTH THE SHOT? SHOULDN'T I AT LEAST TRY? NO EXCUSES, SHELDON....





YEAH, NO EXCUSES  
YOU EMOTIONAL  
COWARD.

I REPROGRAMMED THE AIRCAR  
FOR MY NEW DESTINATION. ONE  
HAPPY WORLD WAS ABOUT TO  
BECOME ONE CHAOTIC WORLD,  
AND I WAS ONLY TOO PLEASED  
TO PARTICIPATE IN ITS ROCKY  
TRANSFORMATION.

IT WAS ABOUT TIME SOME-  
THING OTHER THAN ME DID  
THE CHANGING AROUND HERE.  
LET'S SEE HOW BIG MACHO  
FOWLER HANDLES THAT....

I THINK MAYBE I'M  
GONNA LIKE THIS  
NEW NORMAL LIFE....

END.



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