

# Wunderkammer



by CHIKI

Spring, twenty ten

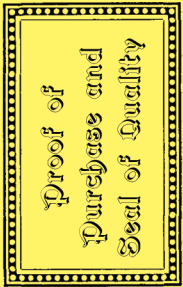
Auk Brand Comics

San Francisco

WUNDERKAMMER TWO constitutes the second volume in an anticipated series of indefinite number, irregularly published at the leisure of Auk Brand Comics, which was established at Alamo Square, San Francisco, in the fortuitous year of two thousand nine. All the contents of this comic magazine are under the copyright control of Sean C. Chiki, 2010. All inquiries should be directed to the publisher at the following world wide web address [www.aukbrandcomics.com](http://www.aukbrandcomics.com).



And then just as the last chime sounded, at the mouth of the passage, the apparition appeared!



The following seal of purpose and proof of purchase is emblematic of our pledge to bring quality, desipent, surreal, intamarreous, unsual, slightly baf fling, sophrosyne, amusing, slightly irregular, oft times childish yet somewhat spadish, phlegm reducing, mercurial, logorhethic, pogoniasis provoking and wholesome entertainment to each and every one of our loyal readers. Tell your fellows **BUY AUK BRAND COMICS!**

Three exciting tales of fantasy and strange adventure continue in this issue... the crew of the Ginny Sue faces new treachery and peril in **THE FLYING DUCHESS**... stories of ghostly visitations and a tragic family curse abound in **STARLING HALL**... and will the secrets of a pulp writers disappearance and death be revealed amongst the pages of his last manuscript? Find out in **THE TRANSPARENT!**





# Who's Who in Eastmarch



**Catherine Penshaw** (Mad Catherine), wife of Robert Edward Penshaw and mother of the fourth Earl Suttentow, seemed remarkably free from the eccentricities of her family for most of her life. This changed, however, during her last six years, when visitors to Clynmouth Manor were disturbed to find themselves introduced to a giant, invisible cat by the name of Sturdy Thom. Although there were never any reports of any visible cats inhabiting the house, after Catherine's death, several curious jars were found to contain unusually large whiskers.

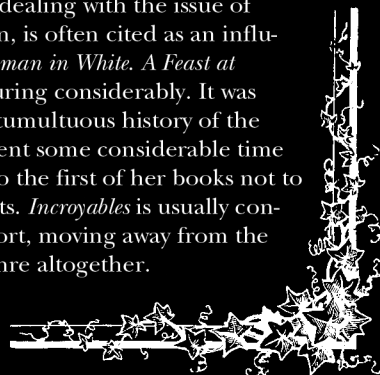
- *Noted Eccentrics of Eastmarch*, Redmund Cuttle, 1837 Morley House



**Jocasta Elsa Wintern** (Langley) (b. August 17, 1819. d. June 13, 1901). A highly popular novelist in her day, Jocasta Wintern was born in Newcastle, the only child of Isaac Wintern and his wife Sarah. Isaac's father had made a fortune in trade and converted the family from Judaism to the Anglican faith. Jocasta was given the finest education in Vienna and Paris and started writing at an early age. Her first novel, *The Countess in Red* was published in monthly installments of cheap 'penny bloods' or 'penny dreadfuls' by the publisher James Langley of Epslow. It proved to be a phenomenal success. Shortly thereafter Langley proposed and they were married in 1841. *Undead Symphony* marked the beginning of her collaboration with the illustrator Christian O'Hare. He would illustrate her next two books as well. *The Shadow on the Landing*, dealing with the issue of wrongly imprisoned women, is often cited as an influence on Wilkie Collins' *Woman in White*. *A Feast at Midnight* saw her style maturing considerably. It was based in large part on the tumultuous history of the Penshaw family and she spent some considerable time researching it. This was also the first of her books not to be published in installments. *Incroyables* is usually considered to be her finest effort, moving away from the trappings of the Gothic genre altogether.

Principal works: *The Countess in Red* (1839); *Eleanor* (1840); *Undead Symphony* (1841); *The Shadow on the Landing* (1842); *A Feast at Midnight* (1844); *Incroyables* (1855); *Witch of Stac An Armin* (1858)

About: E. Gaskell, *Penny Blood Countess* (1860).



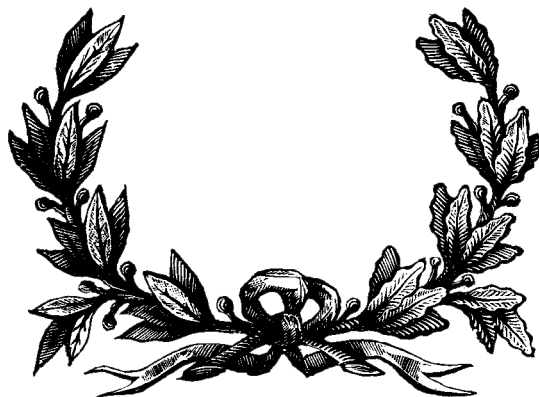
# WUNDERKAMMER

Two

*Tales of Fantasy  
and Strange Adventure*

by

Sean C. Chiki



Auk Brand Comics

San Francisco

2009



Minutes of a closed tribunal  
Held on board the Company Ship

Amphisbaena

in  
Liddenbeck Spacelane  
on Tuesday the twenty-third day of October, 4168 of the New Calendar  
and the following three days  
for the trial of

Martin Luis Argentina, Captain

For the loss of the Company Ship  
Virginia Susanne.

Present: Admiral Montagu, president; Vice-Admiral Holloway; Vice-Admiral Thornborough; Vice-Admiral Sutton; Vice-Admiral Rowley; Rear-Admiral Sir I. Coffin; Captain Bissett; Captain Irwin; Captain Seater; Captain Larmour; Captain Oliver; Captain Wood; Honorable Captain Capel

M. Greetham, Esq. Deputy Judge Advocate of the Fleet.

The prosecution was conducted by Charles Bicknell, Esq. Solicitor of the Admiralty,  
assisted by W. G. Knight, Esq.

The Defense was conducted by Petronius Drummond, Esq., assisted by H. Brownlow,  
Esq.

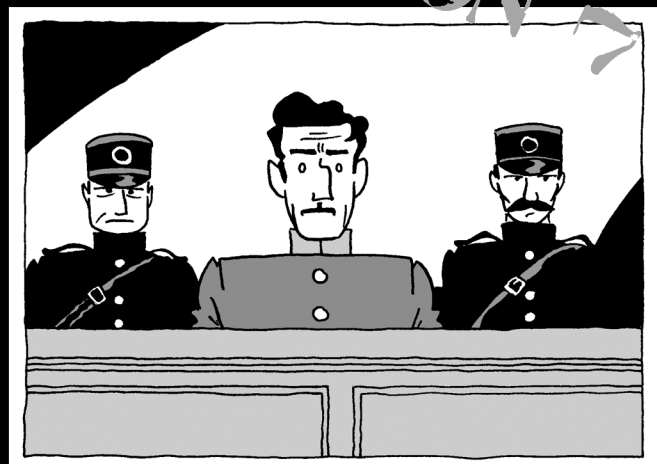
The court opened at half past ten, and Captain Martin Argentina being called in, entered, attended by the Marshall of the Admiralty. The authority under which the court sat (of which the following is a copy), together with the charges against the prisoner, was then read by Moses Greetham, Esq. Judge Advocate.....

A man makes his way following a familiar pattern: setting out from his home, his family and friends, he ventures forth into the greater world. There he makes his name, his fortune and achieves those various accomplishments, at the end of which he may look back in leisure at the course of his life and reflect upon the turns it has taken. Martin Argentina was not destined to be such a man. Although his accomplishments were many and of such a caliber that just one of them could possibly serve as the work of a lifetime for any average man, Martin was a failure because he could never manage to get a reign on his life. His past and his future both worked to pull him apart, and for that he was never able to really exist in the present. One could often see it in his eyes- that faraway gaze that cut through anything before them as if through smoke or vapour. I remember seeing that look as he sat in the dock, listening...

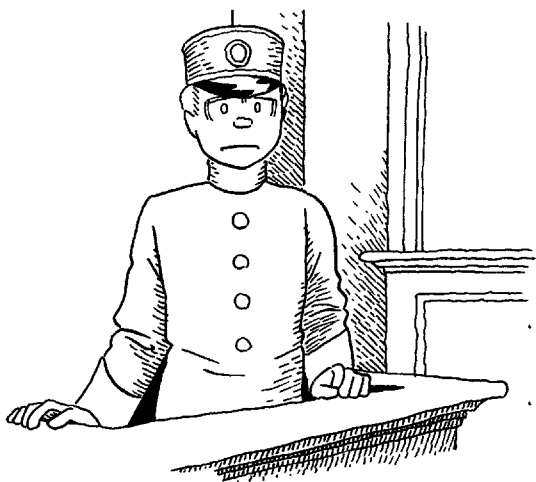
# THE FLYING DUCHESS

CLASSIFIED  
DIVISION

...listening as I gave the evidence that helped remove him from his command and destroy any chance he had of ever making admiral.



I wasn't pleased. Personally, I thought he was innocent. Indeed, I considered the Captain my friend. He believed in me, promoted me, encouraged my efforts to get my lieutenant's commission. But it all came to naught.



Q: Would you please tell the court, Mr. Vanterpol, your recollections concerning the Virginia Susanne's mission to Muresh during this August last. Who were on the crew during that time?

A: Besides the Captain and myself, there was midshipman Otto Cleves who was navigator, Lt. John Quinn, who was the gunner and our engineer, Marek Handle.

Q: You were helmsman aboard the Virginia Susanne, were you not?

A: Yes. I had been since Lt. Duplassey transferred earlier in the year to take a post aboard the Company Farliner Moljna.

Q: Were there any others aboard the ship during the mission?

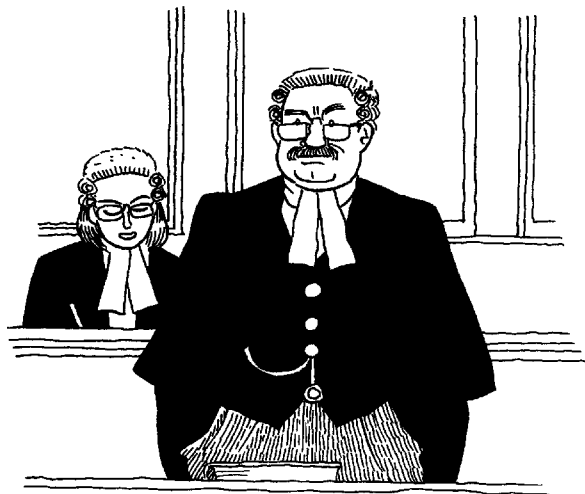
A: Yes. A delegation of matrii. Four of them in all.

Q: And what was the purpose of their presence?

A: They were sent by the Church to accompany the cargo, which was Church property and which was being transported to one of their installations.

Q: What knowledge, Mr. Vanterpol, did you have of the exact nature of the cargo?

PROSECUTION: I object my lord. The nature of the cargo is not under question here.



JUDGE: While I would normally allow such questioning, there are certain restrictions currently in place that will prevent us from discussing the nature of the cargo. You may proceed Mr. Drummond, with that in mind.

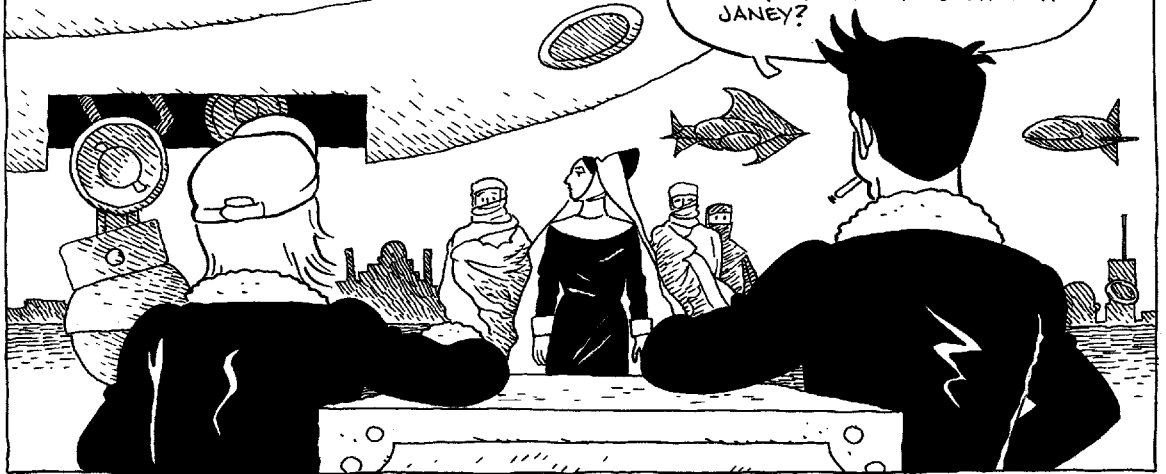
DRUMMOND: Yes, my lord. Mr. Vanterpol, will you relate to us then the events leading up to the loss of the Virginia Susanne?

JANE: We started out in Alleppa...

...at the Archive. We loaded  
in our cargo...

... SOMETHING CALLED THE  
RAARDSOFF AMETHYST.

HERE THEY ARE NOW.  
EVER CONSIDER A CAREER  
FOR YOURSELF IN THE CHURCH  
JANEY?



IN FACT, I DID. IT WAS EITHER THAT  
OR FLEET... OR THE MILITARY.  
BUT I COULDN'T BEAR  
THE THOUGHT OF  
WEARING ONE  
OF THOSE  
HABITS.



I DUNNO...  
I FIND THEM  
QUITE FETCHING.



I  
SUPPOSE IT  
JUST TAKES  
THE RIGHT  
TYPE...

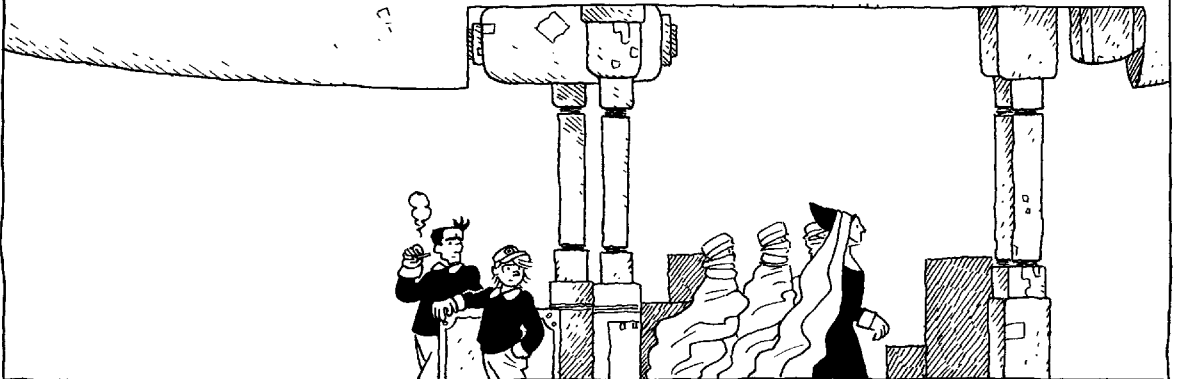
EH?



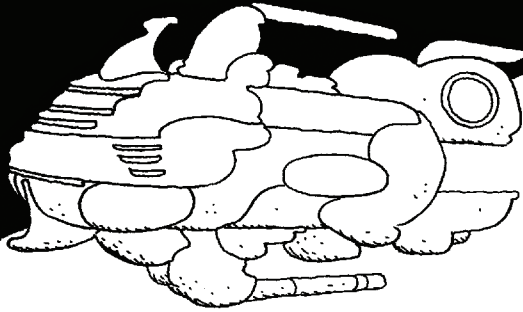
Joining Fleet was one of the only ways out. I was running with a bad crowd in those days. But my childhood hadn't been easy. I lived with my mother and her wife until I was five. That's when my mother bolted with one of her lovers, and my adopted mother died a year later and so I was given over to the biological to raise. He made a half-hearted attempt at first, but he never really wanted to be a father, and I never was too much interested in being his daughter.

He used to tell me I'd end up 'Jack Gun'- that is, either in the army or in jail. Shows how much confidence he had in the fruit of his loins. Of course, his main pursuit in life was drunkenness, so I never really had much in the way of parental guidance. In all his gin-soaked sophistry, though, I wager he never imagined things would turn out for me as they had. I joined Fleet partly to spite him. But the real reason I'm alive today was my grandmother.

She was the only one who took a sincere interest in my childhood development. She was one of those *Grand Old Dames*- a daughter of Old Praetoran society who'd married unwisely- that is for love instead of position. The thing that changed me for good and steered me away from a life of petty crime, was the trip she and I took to *OTC City*. There, for the first time, I saw a world based in commerce and travel and adventure. I saw a world of opportunity in which merit trumped birthright. From that point, I could not look back. At the age of thirteen, I enlisted in the Out-remmer Trading Company's Fleet Academy.







Q: Was there any discussion between you or any of the other crew and the Captain regarding the nature of the cargo?

PROSECUTION: Objection my Lord!

JUDGE: Sustained. Watch yourself Mr. Drummond. I'll not remind you again.

DRUMMOND: Yes, My Lord. Let's talk about the trip from Alleppa, up until the attack. Was there anything eventful that you recall?

VANTERPOL: Well, once we'd reached a comfortable cruise, the Captain invited the matrii to the pilothouse for a tour.

Q: A tour?

A: Yes, well I think, being as they were honored sisters, the Captain wanted to impress them.

Q: This was not something he usually did with passengers aboard the Virginia Susanne?

A: No.

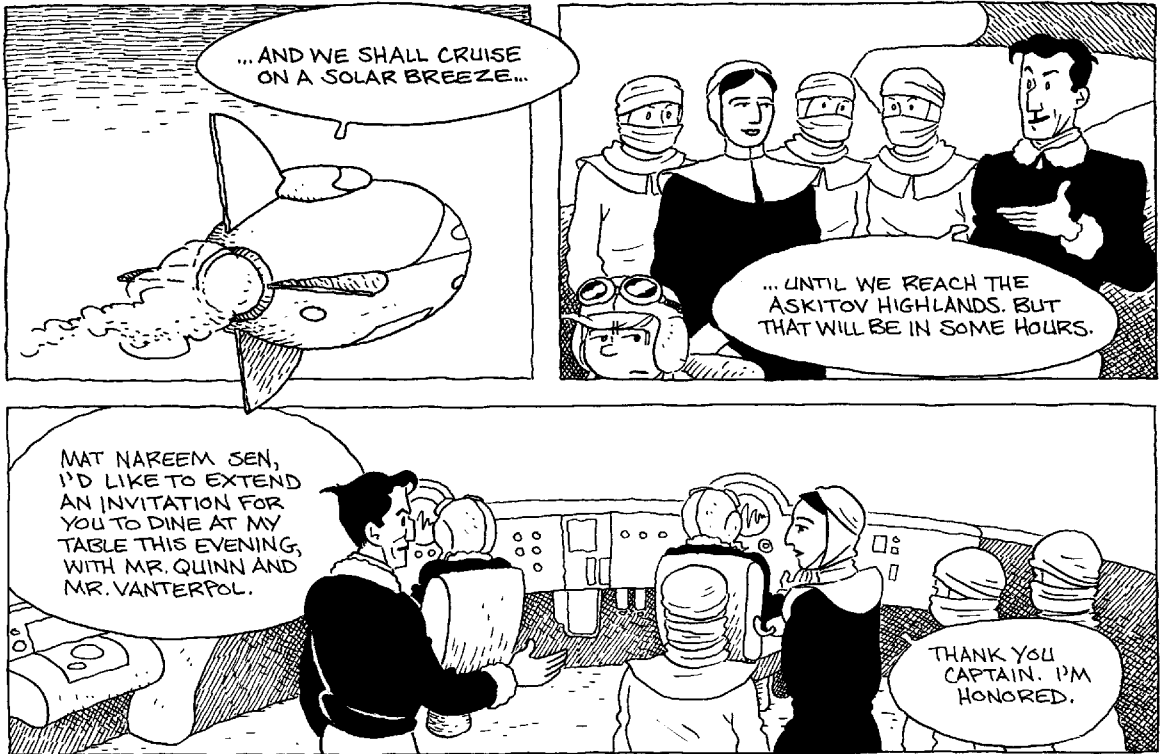
Q: Do you consider the Captain a religious man?

A: As far as it goes.

JUDGE: Would you be so kind as to explain that remark, Mr. Vanterpol?

VANTERPOL: What I mean, My Lord, is that the Captain did not seem to me especially interested in religion; but it was not a subject we discussed much.

JUDGE: I see. Carry on Mr. Drummond.



**PROSECUTION:** You mentioned before that Captain Argentina seemed somewhat inebriated during the incident. Was he drinking at dinner?

**A:** Well, yes. We usually had a glass or two of wine with our meal. But I think what I said was that he seemed 'unwell.'

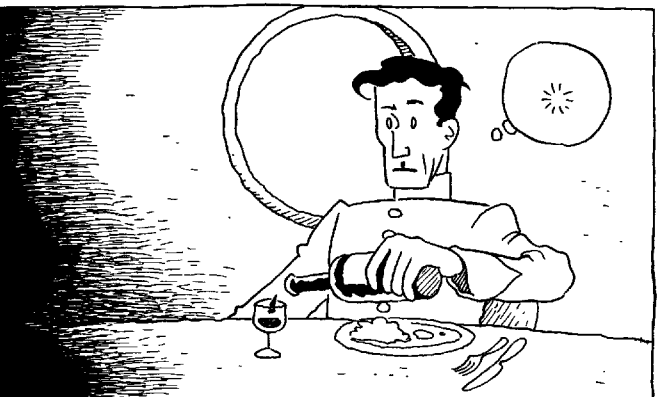
**JUDGE:** Would you read back what the witness said about Capt. Argentina?

[Court record is checked. Witness is confirmed.]

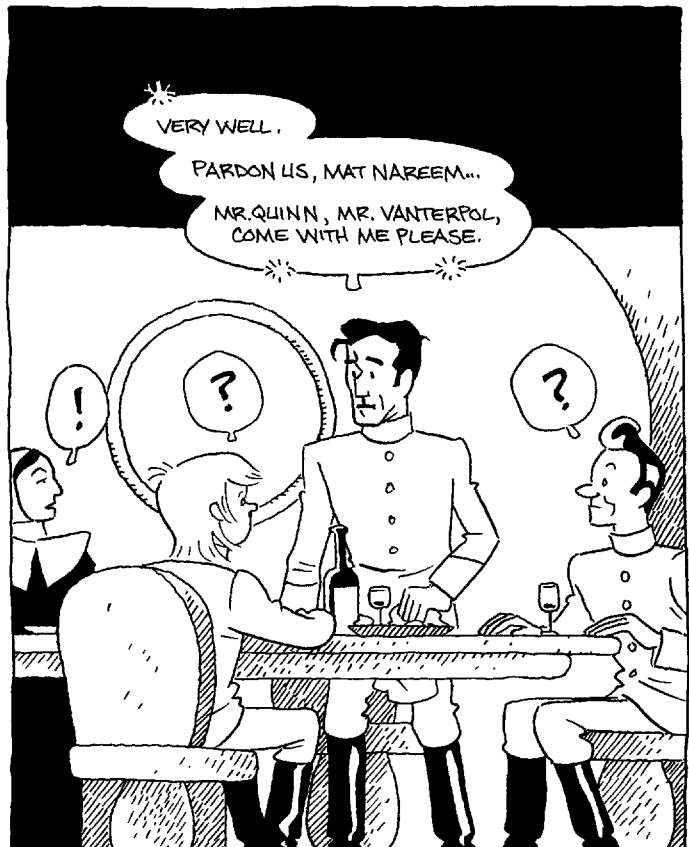
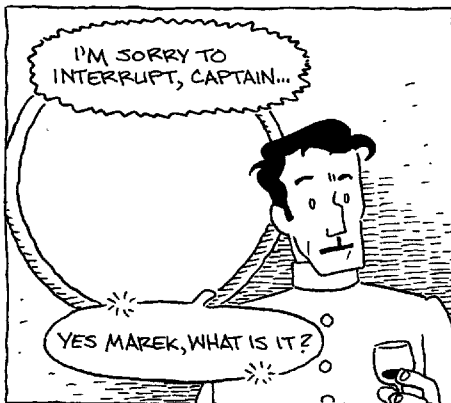
**Q:** Did you notice the Captain drinking more than he normally did at dinner?

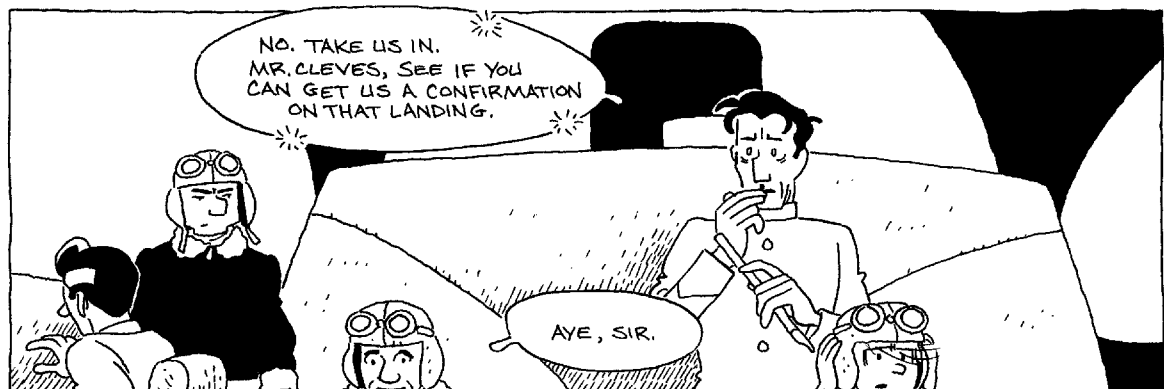
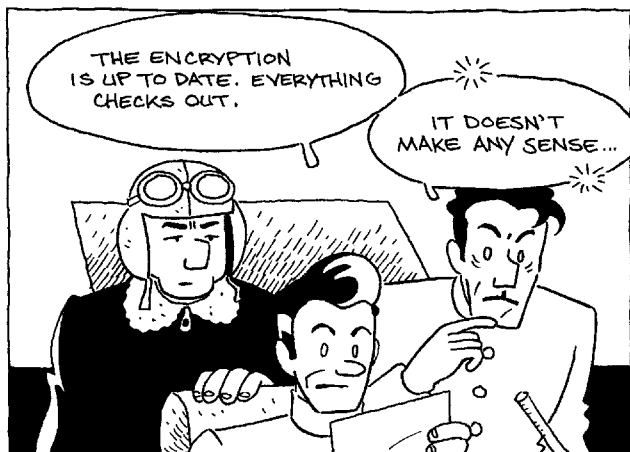
**A:** No sir.

I'd seen the Captain in his cups many a time. He always had a head for the situation, but there was definitely something queer going on. He seemed muddled and unable to concentrate. It was very unlike someone who always seemed so steady and unshakable.



And then there was the conversation between Nareem and the Captain- it seemed as if there was something between them the rest of us were unaware of. I mentioned none of that at the trial, but in retrospect it all made sense.





**DRUMMOND:** You say the transmission was from an OTC relay station at Muresh?

**A:** That's what the message said, yes.

**Q:** Were you aware that the Company had no station in Muresh at that time?

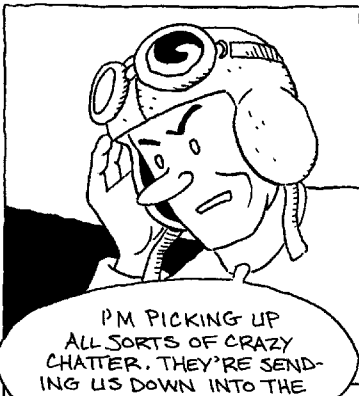
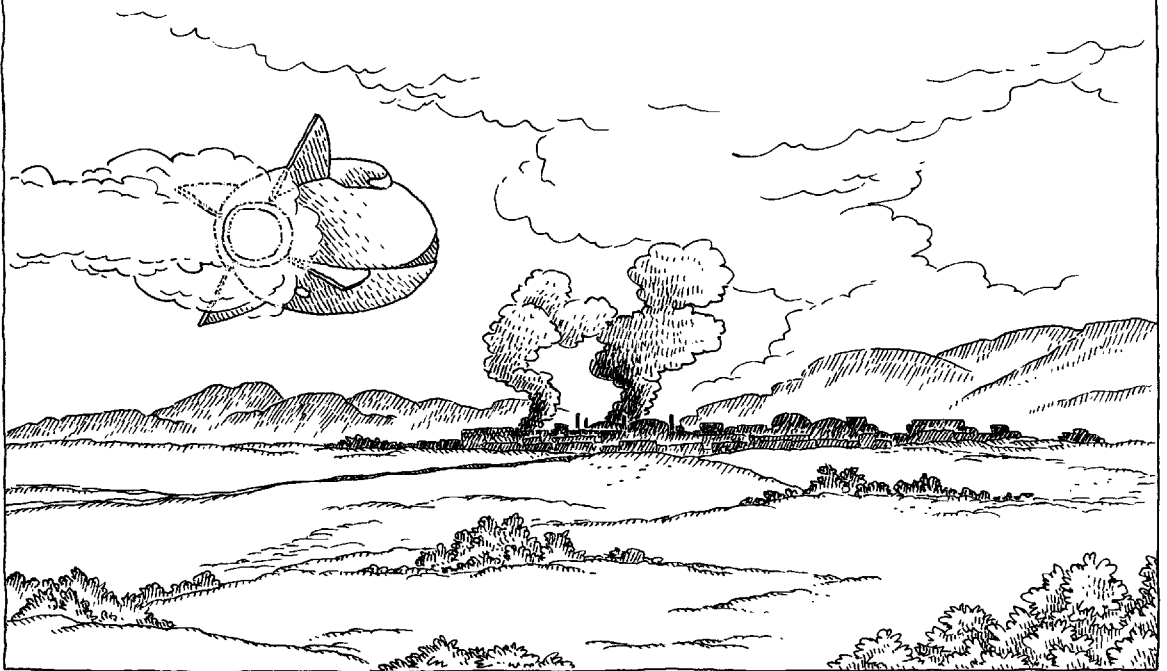
**A:** I wasn't aware of that. But everything was coded correctly, and that's why I felt suspicious later.

**Q:** You mean your suspicion that a member of the crew was responsible for faking the transmission?

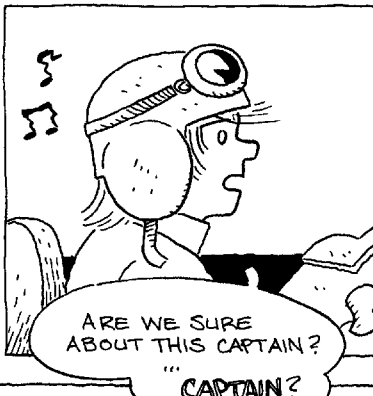
**PROSECUTION:** Objection my Lord! The witness is not here to conjecture over the possibility...

**JUDGE:** Sustained. Get on with it, Drummond. You know better than that.

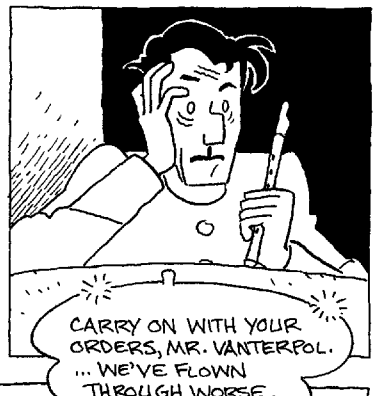
**Q:** Tell us what happened after you received the transmission requesting you change course to Muresh.



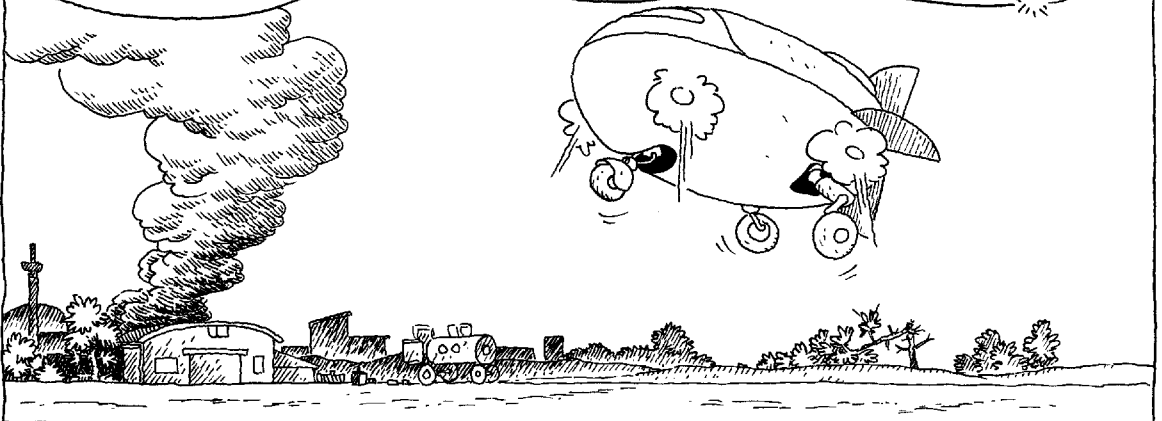
I'M PICKING UP ALL SORTS OF CRAZY CHATTER. THEY'RE SEND-ING US DOWN INTO THE MIDDLE OF A WAR!

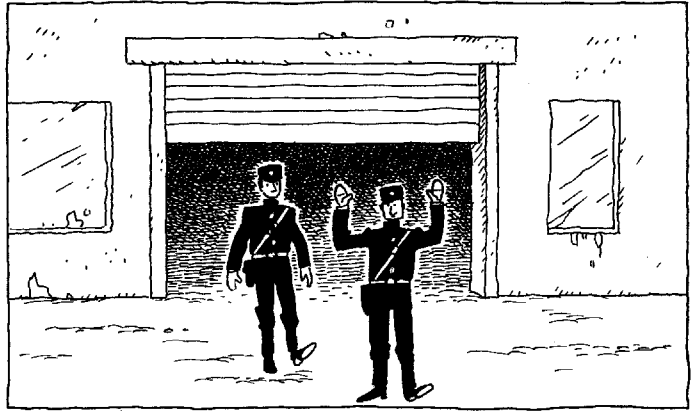


ARE WE SURE ABOUT THIS CAPTAIN?  
...  
**CAPTAIN?**



CARRY ON WITH YOUR ORDERS, MR. VANTERPOL.  
... WE'VE FLOWN THROUGH WORSE.

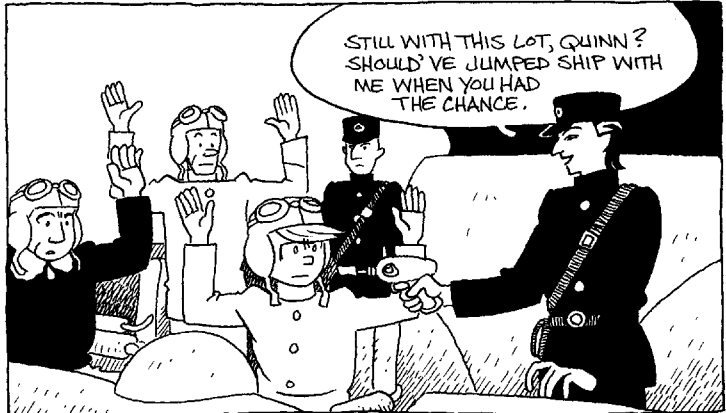
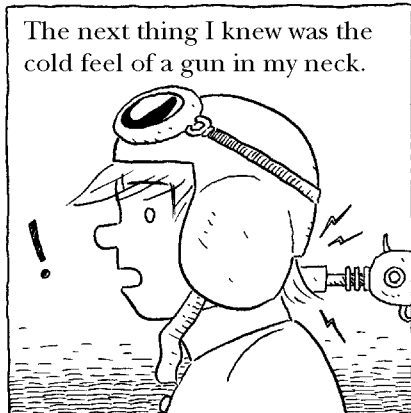
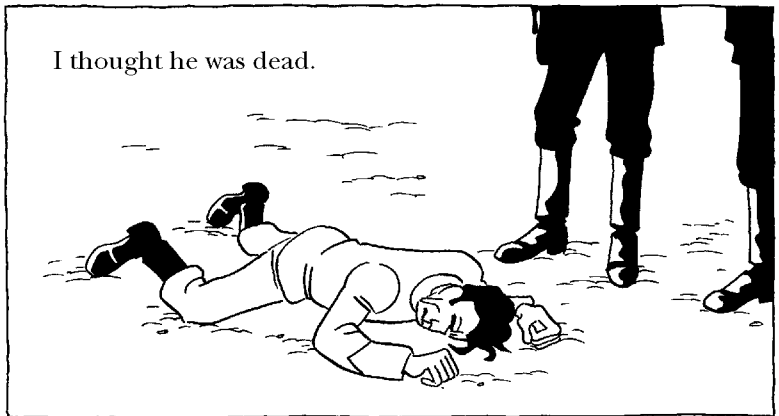


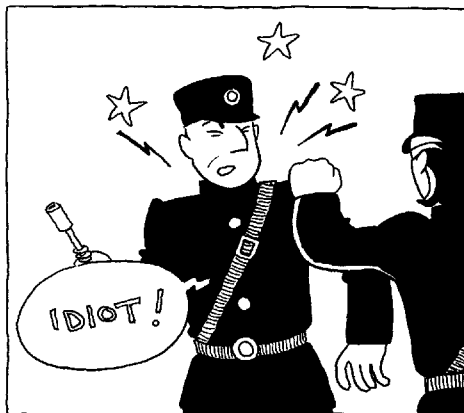
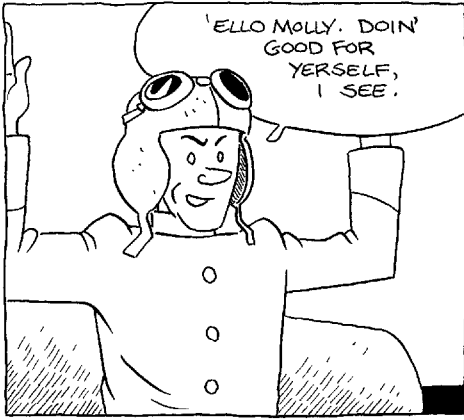


There seemed to be an argument going on between Martin and the gendarmes.

We heard a sound, like something slamming against the hull...

and when we looked out again, Marek was gone and the captain was flat on the ground...





Q: And this is the basis for your belief that the pirates were in fact *VEM*?

A: Yes. Baba I took to mean Babalasu.

JUDGE: Babalasu? Er... Remind me, Mr. Drummond?

DRUMMOND: The nom de guerre of Serafina Giotto, My Lord, a high-ranking capo of the *VEM* operating in the East.

JUDGE: ...operating... in the East... very good. Carry on.

Q: What happened then Mr. Vanterpol?

A: We were taken to a concrete bunker off the airstrip where we heard the explosion. They'd destroyed the *Ginny Sue*. I saw the wreckage when they led us back outside.

Q: And who all was with you at that point?

A: Besides our two captors, one other man in gendarme uniform, along with Quinn, Cleves, three of the mathi and Captain Argentina, who'd sustained a head injury and was barely conscious.

Q: The mathi subaltern, Nareem Sen and Marek Handle were not in your group?

A: No.

Q: Do you know what happened to them?

A: No, sir.

Q: What happened then?

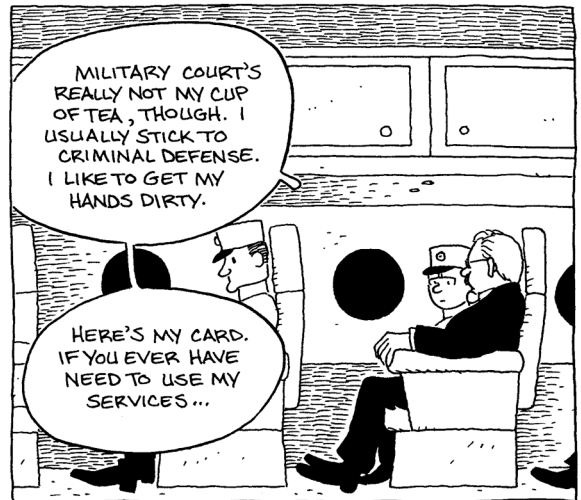
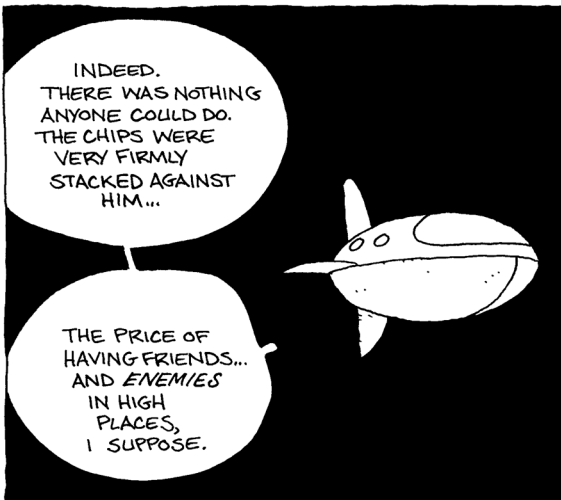
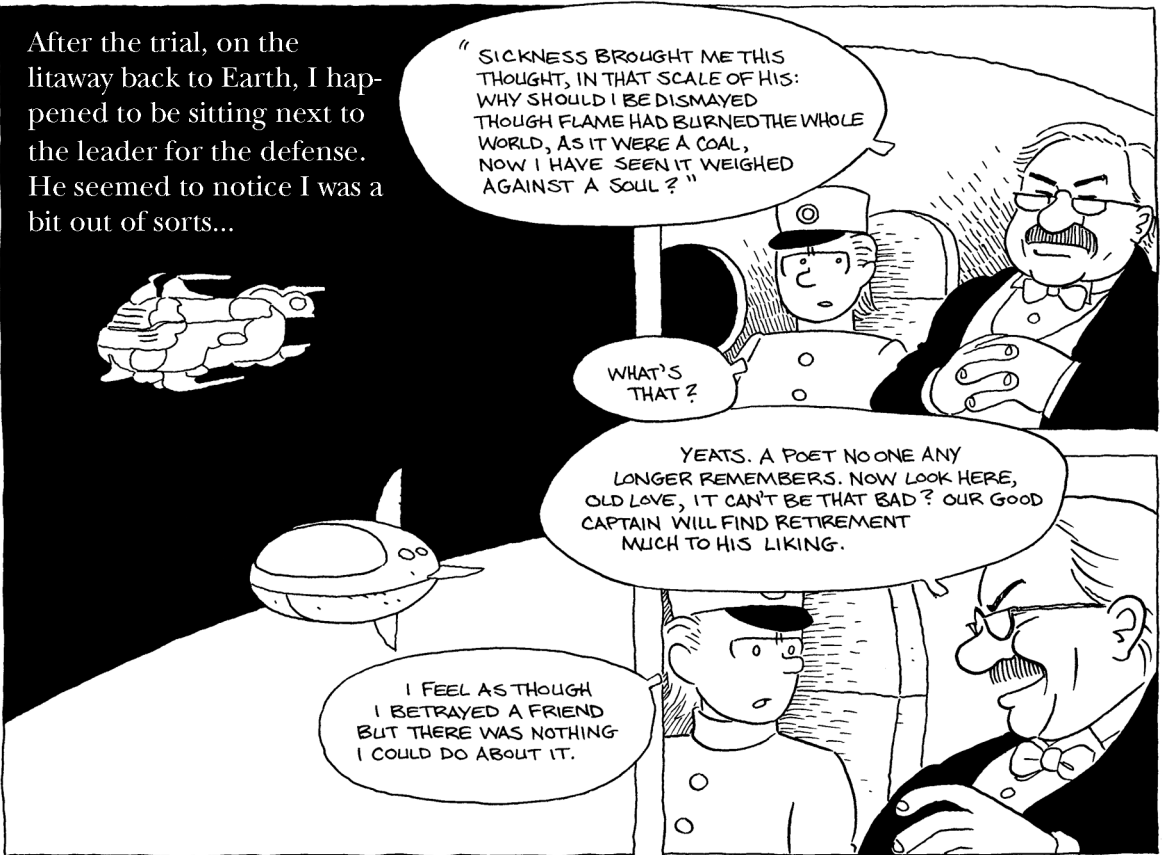
A: We were kept in a safehouse somewhere in Muresh for about twelve hours, after which we were handed over to Szeki militants. They took us to the border with Ostphatia, first through a series of tunnels under the city, then over land. The trip took about a day and a half. We were left at a frontier post where Union soldiers collected us.

Q: Are you aware whether the pirates took the cargo from the *Virginia Susanne*?

A: I assumed they did, sir, but I don't know for sure.

DRUMMOND: Thank you for your testimony, Mr. Vanterpol. Those are all the questions I have, My Lord.

After the trial, on the litaway back to Earth, I happened to be sitting next to the leader for the defense. He seemed to notice I was a bit out of sorts...



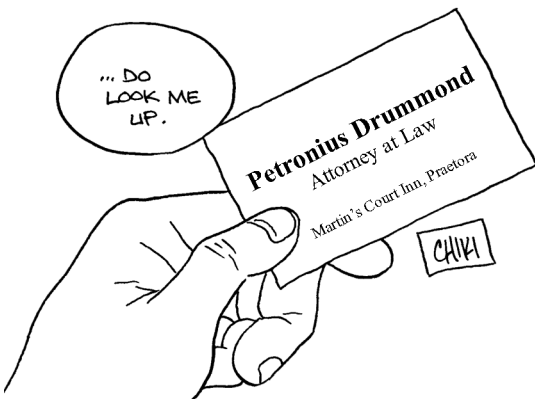
<sup>1</sup>*Locī dōmō nā sequit locī bonā*, 'the most authoritative source is not necessarily the highest source' would be familiar enough to scholars of the Old Romani language and of Aspacia Versullus in particular from whose *Theory of an Ethical Mode of Using Information* it is drawn. Certainly Mat Nareem Sen would have been familiar enough with the work, as it was a primary text of training for novices in the Church. Her use of the commonly mistaken variant, *locī dōmō nā sequit locī varā*, 'the most authoritative source is not necessarily the truthful source' was more than likely a ploy to catch Martin. Aspacia Versullus was not widely read outside of the Church, but her writings did seem to play a singularly influential part in forming the later Literist doctrines of Janic of Effizzo, and their subsequent adoption by certain factions within the VEM... the significance of which, in that Jane perhaps intends it in her narrative, we may only guess. -the editors.

<sup>2</sup>The Iriandic Bloc, allowing for aberrant ethnic pockets here and there, still presented a monolithic structure, more or less under the guidance of the court at Vaneswar, and providing an important buffer for tensions between the Union and the Sarmacian Tsarate. The establishment of a Union residency in Copur in 4167, besides upsetting a long held balance, served to provoke certain antagonisms that were already festering about the frontier region. Noor and Balakshal, both with long histories of abuse under Copuri domination, managed to remain stable despite significant ethnic divisions within their populations. But violence broke out in 4168, in the city and province of Muresh.

The Szeki community, with cultural ties to ethnic pockets within the Sarmacian Tsarate and Ostphalia, rose up in rebellion, but was soon crushed by Copuri intervention. It was rumored that Samacia had been providing the Szekis with aid and the government in Praetora was compelled to issue a statement that any involvement by the Tsarate would be matched by the Union in aid of its ally. The Tsarate claimed no involvement in the affair and an uneasy peace between the two powers held. There were also rumors of OTC involvement despite certain prohibitions to which they were bound by the charters of union.

Yet despite this display of Copuri hegemony in the region, there were already signs of growing strains within the area of its influence. This was of course to come into full bloom with events in Copur itself a few years later, and that was commonly understood as the beginning of the fragmentation of the Union.

-*Political Crisis and Stability in the Late Sovereignty*, Pliny Agrippa the Lesser, Delian House, Alleppa, 4198





Along the north embankment of the river Clynthe, between the Barrow and the Courts of Assizes, there is a pocket of waterfront, a congested tangle of narrow streets and alleys with a teeming stock of life. A marketplace with a vast panoply of goods and wares from the lands of the Grand Turk, the perfumed terraces of the Sarmatian Khanate, the bejeweled halls of the Chanduraj of Gopur and beyond- voices barking in inscrutable tongues, the thick poppy incense, the cicada drone of the hurdy gurdy and the taut dulcimer notes of the cimbalom, a shadowland amidst the heart of the city known to locals as the Maze. The Hungarian speakers came first, fleeing the Habsburg army after the massacre of Madéfalva, sometime in the last century- Szekler tribesmen; Székely they call themselves. Grenville's government granted them asylum. They survived xenophobic attacks and anti-catholic riots and firmly established their presence as part of the eastern trade. After the Székely came others, all carving out their little enclaves amidst the close hive of alleys, brick, wood and mud- Manchurians and Uighurs, Turkomen and Avars. Before long the neighborhood was a flurry of strange sounds, smells, sights and... other sensations.

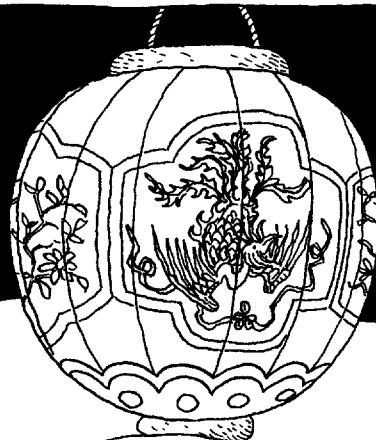
—from *A Visitor's Guide to the Amusements in and Around Epslow* by Redmond Cuttle, 1843, Jas. Langley.

# Starling Hall



It is late in the seventh year of our great queen's reign and the sweet taste of decadence, which coated our tongues during the reigns of her uncles, fades, ever so slowly. Those of us, clinging desperately to its aftertaste, find covers to complete the romance of our exile. I find solace in these days at the end of an opium pipe. And there I gestate, thinking liquid thoughts, until my conscience appears once more.

9:30 p.m.



HOW MUCH OF A LEAD HAVE YOU GOTTEN THEN, MAGPIE?

O'HARE?

WE HAVE AN ENGAGEMENT.

WHY DON'T YOU GO AND OGLE MRS. LANGLEY'S BOSOMLY BOUNTY WITHOUT ME TONIGHT. I'VE HAD A DREADFUL AFTERNOON. I'M NOT SURE HOW WELL I SHALL SUFFER HER EYELASHES FLUTTERING WHILE YOU DRIBBLE DOWN YOUR WESKIT.

YOU'RE A WICKED GIRL!

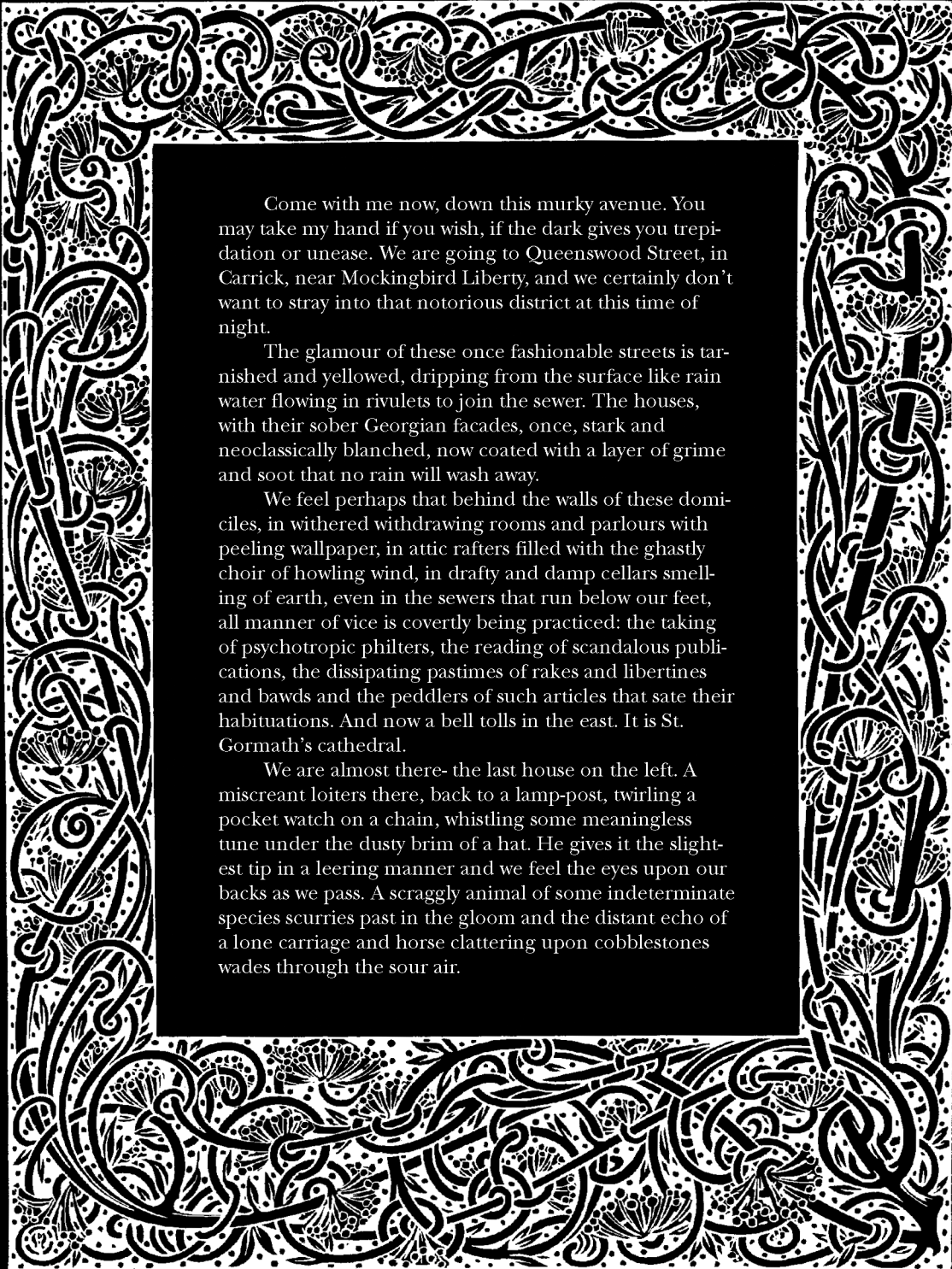
I'D GLADLY LEAVE YOU TO YOUR MINDLESS COLLISION WITH OBLIVION EXCEPT THAT THERE'S A NEW PROSPECT TONIGHT.

MY DEAR, YOU DO TEASE ME. WHY TROUBLE ME WITH SUCH DISTURBING NEWS?

LANGLEY HAS BROUGHT HIS YOUNG COUSIN DOWN FROM WHITBY. I GATHER SHE'S BEEN SENT AWAY FOR SOME REASON OR OTHER.

WELL HE SHOULD PROVE A SUITABLE GUARDIAN FOR HER FURTHER CHASTITY, EH? I SUPPOSE I SHALL HAVE TO PULL MYSELF TOGETHER. YOU WILL HAVE SOMETHING BEFORE WE GO THOUGH, WON'T YOU?...

Micsa!

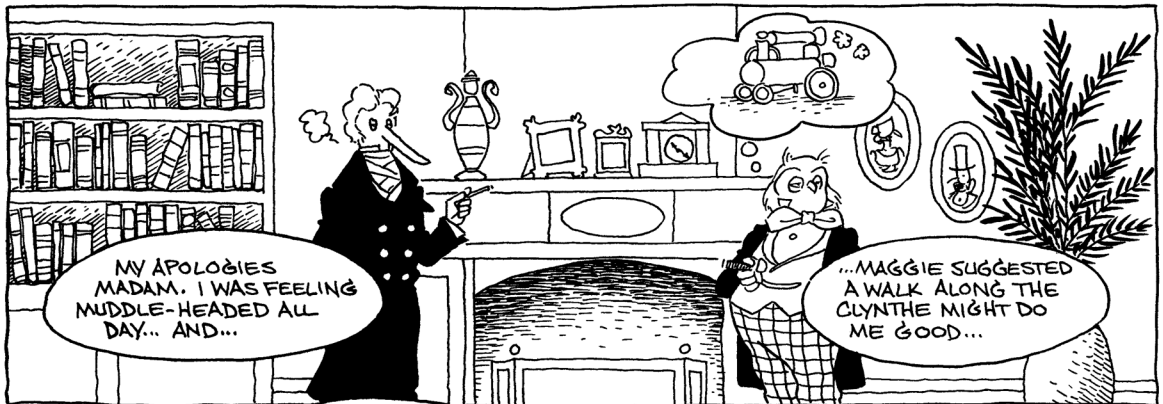


Come with me now, down this murky avenue. You may take my hand if you wish, if the dark gives you trepidation or unease. We are going to Queenswood Street, in Carrick, near Mockingbird Liberty, and we certainly don't want to stray into that notorious district at this time of night.

The glamour of these once fashionable streets is tarnished and yellowed, dripping from the surface like rain water flowing in rivulets to join the sewer. The houses, with their sober Georgian facades, once, stark and neoclassically blanched, now coated with a layer of grime and soot that no rain will wash away.

We feel perhaps that behind the walls of these domiciles, in withered withdrawing rooms and parlours with peeling wallpaper, in attic rafters filled with the ghastly choir of howling wind, in drafty and damp cellars smelling of earth, even in the sewers that run below our feet, all manner of vice is covertly being practiced: the taking of psychotropic philters, the reading of scandalous publications, the dissipating pastimes of rakes and libertines and bawds and the peddlers of such articles that sate their habitations. And now a bell tolls in the east. It is St. Gormath's cathedral.

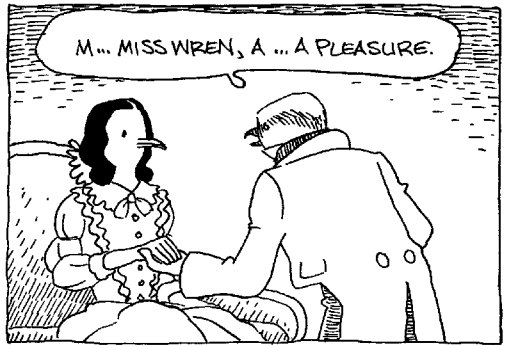
We are almost there- the last house on the left. A miscreant loiters there, back to a lamp-post, twirling a pocket watch on a chain, whistling some meaningless tune under the dusty brim of a hat. He gives it the slightest tip in a leering manner and we feel the eyes upon our backs as we pass. A scraggly animal of some indeterminate species scurries past in the gloom and the distant echo of a lone carriage and horse clattering upon cobblestones wades through the sour air.



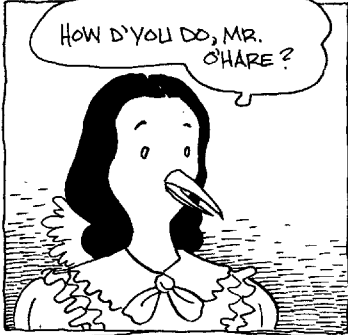


NOW, MR. O'HARE,

I MUST INTRODUCE YOU TO OUR GUEST, LANGLEY'S COUSIN, MISS LUCY WREN.



M... MISS WREN, A ... A PLEASURE.



HOW D'YOU DO, MR. O'HARE?



DON'T LET HER GRAY DRAB FOOL YOU, O'HARE!



THAT'LL DO, LANGLEY!

GRUNT



MY DEAR CHRISTIAN... YOU LOOK A BIT... DISTRESSED!

PERHAPS SOME WINE TO FORTIFY YOU?

NO, NO. I'M QUITE WELL. THANK YOU.



I'VE ALWAYS THOUGHT YOUR QUACKERY HAD ITS USES, DOCTOR.

I HAVE JUST THE THING...

A SNIFF OR TWO OF THIS WILL DO YOUR NERVES VERY FINE.



I'VE READ SOMEWHERE THAT SHAMANS, IN THE REGION OF SIBERIA, PRACTICE A RITUAL, WHICH INVOLVES A CERTAIN TYPE OF ROOT...

... PERHAPS SIMILAR TO SOMATALIS.

YOU SEE, THEY BELIEVE THEIR GOD LIVES WITHIN THE ROOT...

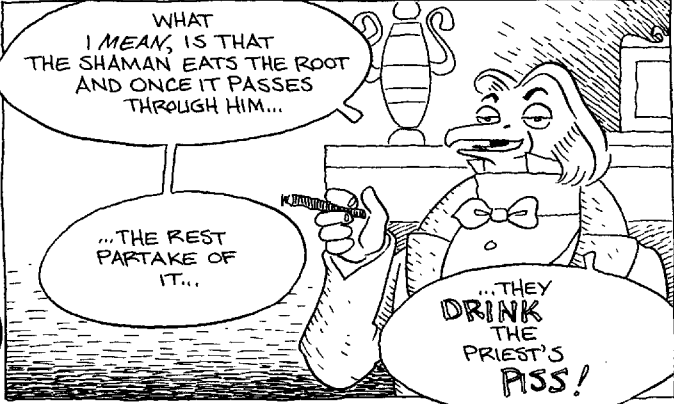
... AND BY EATING IT, THEY BRING GOD INTO THEIR BODIES.

HMMRPH... THE HOLY EUCHARIST.

EXACTLY! BUT AS WITH THE EUCHARIST, IT'S THE PRESENCE OF THE PRIEST THAT CAUSES THE TRANSUBSTANTIATION OF COMMUNION WAFER TO BODY OF CHRIST, SO IT IS THE SHAMAN, WHO IS THE CONDUIT, ALLOWING GOD TO PASS FROM THE ROOT TO THE MOUTHS OF THE SUPPLICANTS...



(GIGGLE)  
WHATEVER  
DO YOU  
MEAN?



WHAT  
I MEAN, IS THAT  
THE SHAMAN EATS THE ROOT  
AND ONCE IT PASSES  
THROUGH HIM...

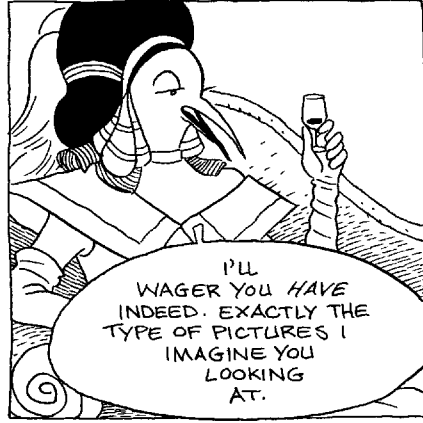
...THE REST  
PARTAKE OF  
IT...

...THEY  
DRINK  
THE  
PRIEST'S  
PISS!



WHAT  
NONSENSE, SIR!  
THE **STUFF** YOU  
COME UP WITH!

IT'S TRUE.  
I SWEAR IT.  
I'VE SEEN ENGRAVINGS  
DEPICTING  
THE CEREMONY...



I'LL  
WAGER YOU HAVE  
INDEED. EXACTLY THE  
TYPE OF PICTURES I  
IMAGINE YOU  
LOOKING  
AT.



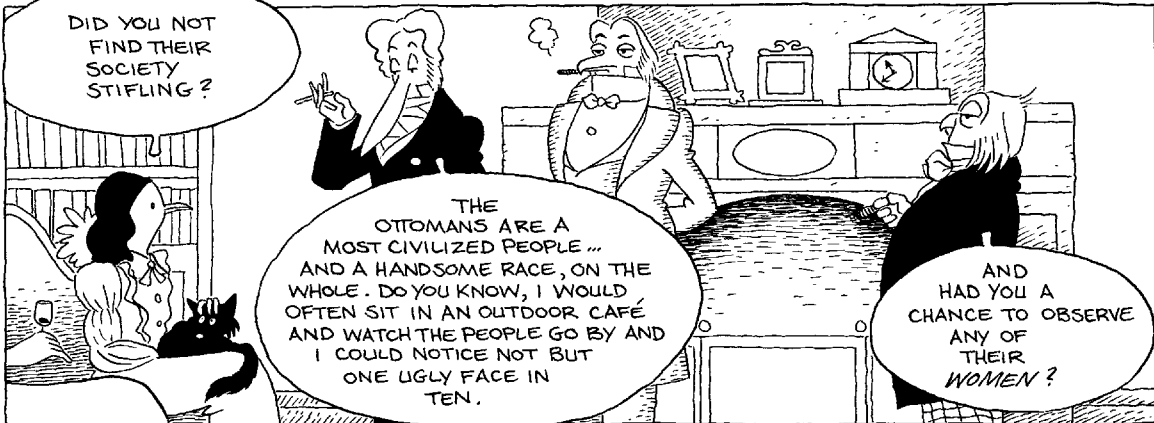
TELL ME  
SIR—  
WHOSE **PISS** WILL  
YOU BE DRINKING  
TONIGHT? OR WILL  
IT BE YOUR  
OWN?

NOT  
TONIGHT.  
I'VE  
HAD TEA  
ALREADY.



GEORGE...  
DO LEND ME ONE OF  
YOUR LITTLE CIGARETTES.

DR. PALLADORUS,  
YOU KNOW,  
HAS SPENT THE  
LAST YEAR TRAVEL-  
LING IN THE LANDS  
OF THE GRAND  
TURK!



DID YOU NOT  
FIND THEIR  
SOCIETY  
STIFLING?

THE  
OTTOMANS ARE A  
MOST CIVILIZED PEOPLE ...  
AND A HANDSOME RACE, ON THE  
WHOLE. DO YOU KNOW, I WOULD  
OFTEN SIT IN AN OUTDOOR CAFÉ  
AND WATCH THE PEOPLE GO BY AND  
I COULD NOTICE NOT BUT  
ONE UGLY FACE IN  
TEN.

AND  
HAD YOU A  
CHANCE TO OBSERVE  
ANY OF  
THEIR  
WOMEN?

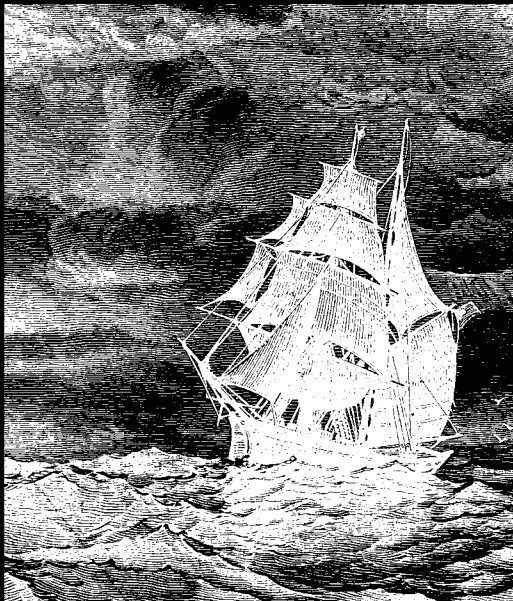
11:45 p.m.

It is customary of our little party that Mrs. Langley entertain, after a late dinner has been eaten, with a ghost story...

WHEN LADY BOLLINGSWICK WAS A YOUNG GIRL IN CLYNMOUTH, HER BROTHER, EDMUND PENSRAW, FELL IN LOVE WITH A LOCAL GIRL BY THE NAME OF VIOLET. THEIR FAMILIES, OF COURSE, WERE VERY MUCH AGAINST THE MATCH, BUT ESPECIALLY SO WAS THE GIRL'S BROTHER, AN INTENSE AND CON-  
NIVING YOUNG MAN, WHOSE PECULIAR ATTACHMENT TO HIS SIBLING LED TO MUCH RUMOUR AND UNNATURAL SPECULATION.



“Edmund took to sea aboard the *Callisto*, which as I'm sure you know, met with great tragedy. A few days after his departure, Violet's body was found at the bottom of a cliff overlooking the sea. It was said that Edmund had broken off the engagement before taking to sea and the girl had flung herself from the cliff in a fit of remorse. Some time after that, news of the *Callisto's* fate had reached Clynmouth, adding to everyone's grief. Violet's brother left the county shortly thereafter, it was said, to pursue a career in the Church. But it wasn't until Lady Bollingswick came into possession of her brother's papers that she began to learn the truth of things.



“According to the record he left behind, Edmund had never broken off the engagement. In fact, they had planned to wait for each other until his return and then elope. This, of course, made the idea of her suicide absurd. And then a year to the day since his death at sea, at midnight, Lady Bollingswick was visited by her dead brother. He revealed to her the truth of Violet's death. Violet had been pushed from the edge of the cliff by her own brother who was consumed in jealous madness. The shade of the dead Edmund gave Lady Bollingswick this task: seek out and find his beloved's murderer so that he might face him and be freed from this state of limbo and that his soul be able to join that of his heart's desire in the afterworld.

“Lady Bollingswick grew up and was married to Sir Hillary Bollingswick. They took up residence in this very house. All the while, year after year, she made inquiries and did whatever she could to discover the whereabouts of the girl’s brother, but she never was able to find any conclusive leads for he must have altered his name and taken care to hide the circumstances of his past.

And then, after a number of years, the Baronet departed this life and Lady Bollingswick was left alone in this house for they had no children and she soon grew to be quite eccentric. As there was very little else to occupy her mind, she became more and more obsessed with her brother’s tragedy and would walk the halls talking to him as if he were there walking along side of her.

It happened that during this time she attended a party and there she met a certain bishop. It took her absolutely no time to recognize the young man in the older man’s face, despite the many years that had passed and after further conversation with the bishop she was convinced without any doubt that this here was the brother of young Violet. It seemed that the bishop did not recognize Lady Bollingswick herself, as she was considerably younger than he at the time and so her appearance was far greater changed.

After the proper interval of time had passed so that it did not seem too unusual, Lady Bollingswick invited the bishop to join her for dinner. The hour for which it was set was rather late but being as she was a lady known for her unusual habits, this was given little consideration and the bishop accepted.

On the appointed night the bishop arrived and was afforded every cordiality. The dinner was well provided and the conversation between them proved easy and thoughtful. In fact so relaxed had they become, each in the other’s company, that the evening passed quickly and before the bishop was aware, it was already approaching the midnight hour.

It was then that Lady Bollingswick changed her tack, and with a grave expression upon her face, launched into a speech explaining to the bishop that she was aware of his original identity and his past crimes involving their departed siblings. As the bishop listened to her story, a mounting crescendo of shock and outrage built within him.

‘A lie!’ the bishop roared, rising from his seat and pounding the table with his fist. His face was now fully flushed with rage.

‘Who told you this preposterous tale!? Where is the evidence to support your mad assertions!?’

‘The dead talk, Bishop,’ replied Lady Bollingswick, sitting with perfect stillness and calm.

‘One who knows has told me, one who has heard the truth from the wailing moans of his dead beloved carried on the wind all the way to his watery grave, calling him forth to come and face her murderer.’

Lady Bollingswick looked at the clock, which was just about to strike midnight.

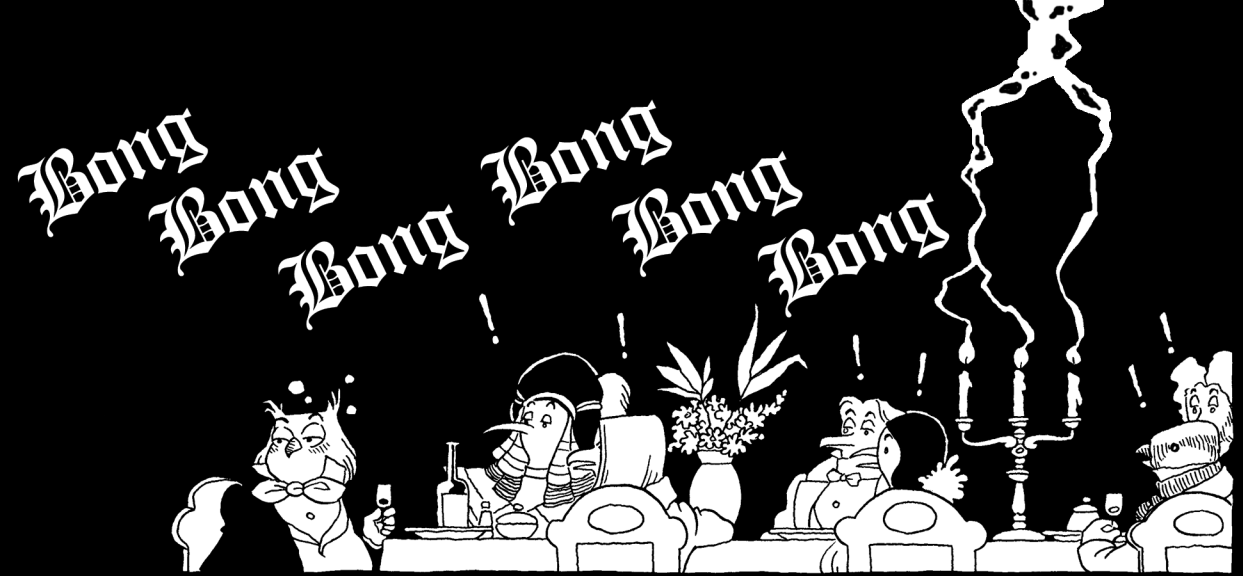
‘And now, look there Bishop, for he is here.’

The clock struck and as the chimes counted the first hour of the morning, there was a horrifying sound, a sickening wet sludge, from far off it seemed, of a lethargic mass being pulled from the depths of the ocean. And then there were footsteps- horrible, hollow footsteps, more terrifying and ominous than you ever heard, approaching, drawing near from the direction of the hall. And then just as the last chime sounded, at the mouth of the passage, the apparition appeared!

Bong  
Bong  
Bong  
Bong  
Bong  
Bong

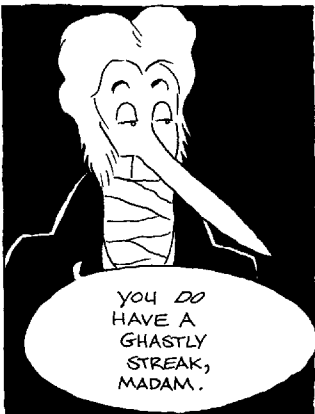
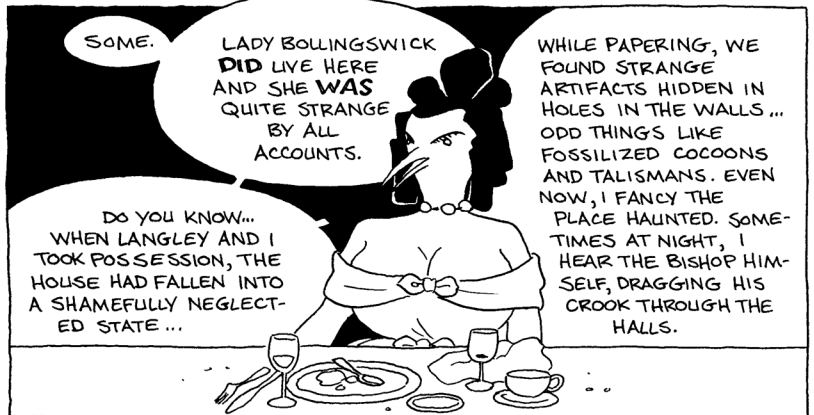






“As the bishop stared in open-mouthed shock, there stood the shade of the dead Edmund Penshaw, swathed in its burial shroud, which emitted an unearthly glow amidst the dimness of the passage as if it were some glimmering ember spat forth from the abyss of Hell. Its eyes, sunk deep in the cadaverous recesses of its face shone forth with an accusing glare. From its clenched teeth displayed bare from lips stretched back in putrefaction, there came a gruesome howl, starting deep from some pit in its cursed breast and climbing in pitch and volume to a terrible shriek. For as a shade, it was able to do little more of course but a ghastly howl from its black throat could send the most heroically constituted man into spasms of madness. The bishop, who was still standing in outrage, was now turned to face the passage and with mouth agape in a mute expression of horror, staggered backwards at the sight of the ghastly specter, grabbing hold of the top of his chair to steady himself. The corpse raised its decayed hand, green and partly covered with scraps of the death shroud clinging and pointed to the cleric. There was a scream, a bone piercing shriek and it was impossible to say from whence it issued for both stood with gaping maws, the one in abject horror, the other in accusing outrage and then the bishop fell lifeless to the floor. Slowly the apparition dissolved into nothingness and before the clock struck one minute past midnight, the scene was complete.”





HAVEN'T YOU GUESSED?

I DRINK.  
I ENGRAVE.  
AND I SURROUND MY-  
SELF WITH SILLY  
PEOPLE.

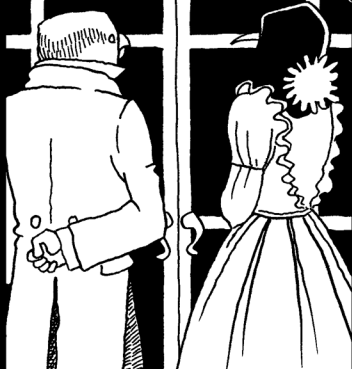
I'D VENTURE  
TO GUESS THERE'S  
MORE OF YOU THAN  
THAT. I SENSE...

WHAT  
DO YOU  
SENSE?

HAVE YOU  
SOME EXTRA-  
ORDINARY POWERS  
OF PERCEPTION?

...

I  
SENSE  
BITTERNESS  
IN YOU.



THAT'S  
TRUE.

I SENSE  
THAT YOU DON'T  
HAVE A  
PARTICULARLY FLAT-  
TERING VIEW OF  
SOCIETY.

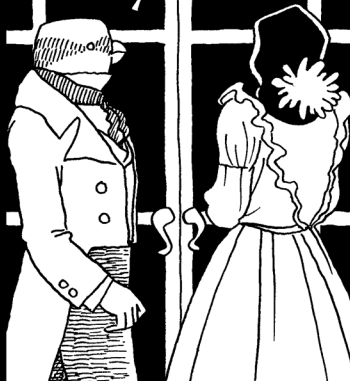
I DO  
NOT.

I  
ADMIT IT.

INDEED,  
MY VIEW IS VERY  
BLEAK, AND, FOR THE  
SAKE OF POLITENESS  
I WON'T ELUCIDATE.

PLEASE  
DON'T SPARE ME,  
SIR. I HAVE NOT THE  
DELICATE SENSIBILITIES  
OF MY SEX, AS  
YOU SUPPOSE.

I...  
DON'T SUPPOSE  
THAT.



MAY  
I ASK...

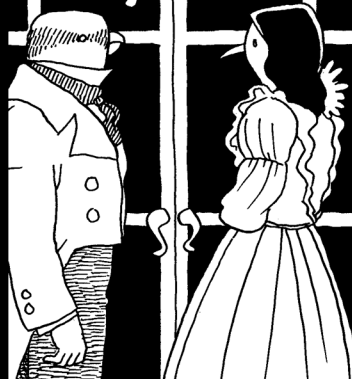
IF IT IS NOT  
TOO MUCH OF  
AN IMPOSITION  
...

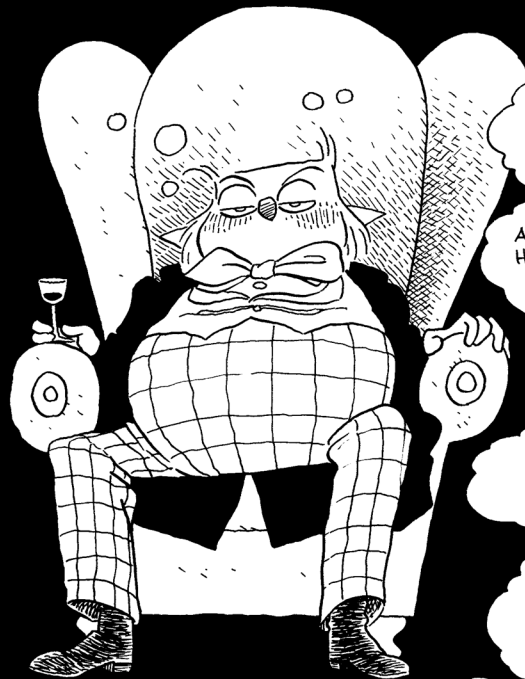
WHAT  
LANGLEY  
MEANT EARLIER  
TONIGHT? YOU  
DON'T HAVE TO  
ANSWER.

HE  
REFERS TO A  
SCANDAL I ALLOWED  
TO BE BROUGHT UPON  
MYSELF. IT'S WHY I  
LEFT WHITBY...  
AND WHY YOU SEE  
ME SO PLAIN.

MISS...

NOTHING  
ABOUT  
YOU IS  
PLAIN.





ASHMOLE.

DAMN' IM.

GASSING ON TO NO  
END ABOUT SOME  
PROPERTY HE WISHES  
TO SELL. AS IF I  
HAVE THE MONEY.

HMMM...

I MIGHT  
KEEP MY EYE  
ON THAT FENIAN  
ENGRAVER.

BE DAMNED IF  
I'M  
CUCKOLDED BY  
AN ADVENTURER LIKE  
HIM. SEEMS RATHER  
OCCUPIED WITH THE  
NIECE THOUGH.

FINE  
GIRL.

HAS  
BLOSSOMED  
PRETTY.

TOO  
BAD ABOUT  
ALL THAT  
BUSINESS IN  
WHITBY.

STILL...

A  
WARM  
COUSINLY EXPRESSION  
OF  
CONCERN...

SHOULD KEEP  
HER OUT OF  
TROUBLE. PERHAPS  
A VISIT SOME NIGHT  
TO HER  
ROOMS...

A  
SOLID SHOULDER  
OF  
CONSOLATION...

YES.

VERY  
FINE  
INDEED.

LADY  
PONSONBY.

NOW  
THERE IS  
A WOMAN  
FOR YOU.

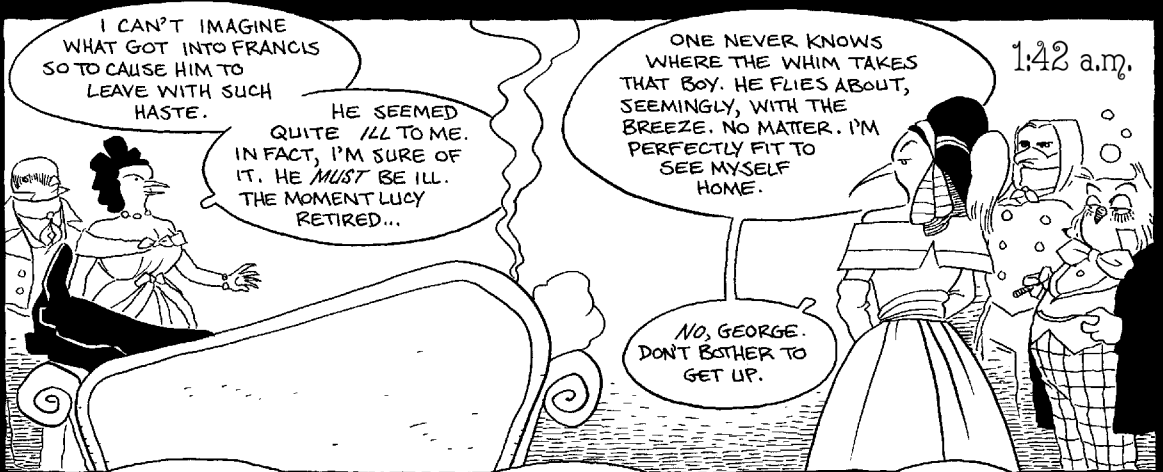
THIS AMAZON  
FRIEND OF O'HARE'S  
IS RATHER HANDSOME  
IN HER OWN WAY  
AS WELL...

WASTED  
ON THIS ASHMOLE  
CHAP, I CAN  
TELL YOU!

... AND  
HAS  
THE  
SPIRIT!

DAMN  
JOCASTA  
STARING AT THAT  
RASCAL!

DOES SHE  
MEAN TO  
MAKE A FOOL  
OF ME?!



1:42 a.m.

I CAN'T IMAGINE WHAT GOT INTO FRANCIS SO TO CAUSE HIM TO LEAVE WITH SUCH HASTE.

HE SEEMED QUITE ILL TO ME. IN FACT, I'M SURE OF IT. HE *MUST* BE ILL. THE MOMENT LUCY RETIRED...

ONE NEVER KNOWS WHERE THE WHIM TAKES THAT BOY. HE FLIES ABOUT, SEEMINGLY, WITH THE BREEZE. NO MATTER. I'M PERFECTLY FIT TO SEE MYSELF HOME.

NO, GEORGE. DON'T BOTHER TO GET UP.



WELL, I MAY AT LEAST CALL HENRY TO SEE YOU TO THE DOOR.



NO NEED. I SHALL SEE THE LADY OUT. I MUST RETIRE ANYWAY.

GOODNIGHT, MY LITTLE "FANNY".



GENTLEMEN.

MISS RAARDSOFF.

**O'HARE:** ... WHEN I MENTIONED THE CALLISTO, HE DENIED THAT HIS UNCLE HAD ANYTHING TO DO WITH IT.

**JOCASTA:** OF COURSE HE WOULD. HE'S AS MAD AS A MARCH HARE!

**O:** ADMITTEDLY, HE DID SEEM A BIT ECCENTRIC.

**J:** ECCENTRIC? CHRISTIAN DEAR, THE MAN'S A RAVING LUNATIC! EVERYONE IN THAT FAMILY IS! IT'S THE PENSRAW CURSE.

DIDN'T YOU KNOW THAT?

2:03 a.m.



**O:** OH NO. NOT AT ALL. I MANAGED TO OBTAIN A RATHER NICE COMMISSION. YOU KNOW, SIR RICHARD IS QUITE A BIG FAN OF YOURS. HE WENT ON AND ON ABOUT YOUR BOOKS.

**J:** AND RUIN SUCH A PLEASANT AFTERNOON FOR YOU? WELL, IN ALL HONESTY, I'D MUCH RATHER HAVE HAD YOU RESIDE ME FOR A TURN ROUND THE GARDENS, DUCK, BUT YOU SEEMED QUITE DETERMINED. SHAME IF IT WAS A WASTE OF YOUR TIME.

**O:** WELL... NO. YOU MIGHT HAVE TOLD ME BEFORE I WENT UP THERE.

DID HE REALLY?

WELL, I AM FLATTERED. I'VE ALWAYS SAID HE WAS A SENSIBLE MAN.

I SHALL SEND HIM A COPY OF MY NEW BOOK. YOU KNOW I'M PLANNING TO GO TO CLYNMOUTH NEXT WEEK. WE SHOULD ALL MAKE A HOLIDAY OF IT!

WELL, I BELIEVE I SHALL RETIRE.

LANGLEY'S SNORING KEPT ME AWAKE ALL LAST NIGHT, SO I SHALL BE TAKING THE GUEST ROOM DOWNSTAIRS...

I HOPE I SHAN'T BE DISTURBED.

TELL ME, O'HARE, HAVE YOU NOT YET BEDDED OUR DEAR MRS. LANGLEY?

IT SEEMS TO ME THAT YOU'VE JUST BEEN GIVEN AN OPEN INVITATION TO SING HER A LULLABY.

NOW NOW, OLD MAN... I ADMIRE YOUR PRINCIPLES... ... ARE YOU FEELING ALL RIGHT?

YES... I'M FINE. IT'S NOTHING... THE DRINK, YOU KNOW...

I SAY... DID SOMEONE MENTION CLYNMOUTH?

CHIKI

His question, hanging in the air, answered with silence, Dr. Palladorus languidly brings his somatalis laced cigarette to his mouth and falls back into the hypnogogic half-mind from whence he briefly emerged. O'Hare shambles through drunken, confused thoughts of Jocasta and Miss Wren and his many aimless troubles, to stare blankly at a deck of cards strewn amidst empty glasses and bottles and stubbed cheroots. And I, I pull myself up again, rally the strength to venture back out into the murk of Carrick and find us a cab home.

-The House on Queenswood Street, Marguerita Raårdsoff, 1863



# The Transparent

*I'm a cryptobibliographer. I study and collect books, which may or may not exist. When I tell most people that, they think of the sort of stuff such as the lost works of the Library of Alexandria, or Aristotle's missing books, or grimoires of dubious authorship-literary Maltese Falcons. But really, my interests tend more towards the low brow.*

Tuesday, June 19.

I ride with Nicky, in his cab, along the Boulevard of the Allies, following the Monongahela River from downtown to Oakland. The stereo is blaring dense guitar, accompanied by a throaty howl.

"What are you listening to?" I ask.

"They're called Thanesblood. One of those crazy new metal bands from Norway. The singer is in prison for stabbing his drummer."

I point my eyes straight out the side window, making everything pass by as a blur.

"So where are we going?"

"To visit Clarence Stanton."

"Roth's nephew? How'd you manage to arrange that?"

"I called him. He's in the phone book. He seemed receptive... or at least, he didn't seem to mind if we payed him a visit."

We take Forbes Avenue into Oakland, through the collegiate town and down into what resembles a modern Agora-past the Carnegie Library and Museum and the Scafe Gallery, past the gothic obelisk of the Cathedral of Learning, the twin sphinxes standing guard at the entrance to the Syria Mosque, past the Masonic Temple and the Soldiers and Sailors Hall-that Beaux Arts replica of the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus, emerging finally into the fey, leafy otherworld of Shadyside. The cozy old streets soon give way to the bleak projects of East Liberty, where urban segregation has damned even the trees that struggle to survive in their small plots amidst a sea of urine-stained concrete.

We pull up to Clarence Stanton's place, painted a dull, dark and now peeling red. The bottom floor seems a lifeless, burnt-out shell. A dubious stairway clings to the side, allowing passage to the apartment on the second floor, the windows of which glow anemic yellow.

We creak our way up, clutching at the handrail and knock on a rusted screen door. The main door is open and we peer into a filthy kitchen. A doorway beyond seems to lead into a dim living room, and from there, our host emerges in blue workpants, clean but worn, and a plaid shirt, the top button undone to reveal a white t-shirt beneath. He is shaven, has a barbershop haircut and wears tortoise shell framed eye-glasses. Clarence Stanton greets us with a smile and flushed face.

"Hullo, hullo," he says as if we each deserve our own greeting.

"Mr. Stanton?" says Nicky.

"You must be Nicholas."

I detect the lingering ghost of a New Jersey accent.

"That's right. This is my colleague Eoghan Nagy."

"Good to know you, Mr. Nodge." He takes my hand. His grip is neither too limp nor too forceful. It tells me nothing.

"Can I offer you some tea, or some milk, or I might have some soda..." he waves us to an old Formica table with knife marks on the surface. A book, sheathed in yellowing Mylar, with a library tag on its spine, sits atop a magazine- *National Geographic*, 1972. I spy the title of the book before Stanton clears it from the table: *Arctic Fowl as Symbol and Allegory in Secret Societies*. The rest of the kitchen is, on further inspection, not so dirty. It's just old and in dire need of remodel. The years have left a patina of oily grime on the cupboards and the linoleum. In one corner is a plastic trash can, overflowing with newspapers, and behind it lean a broom and a sponge mop.

"I'm still going through some of my uncle's things," says Stanton nodding to the book. "I've found some library books that are years overdue. I can't afford to pay those fines."

"I'm sure they'd be happy to just have the books back," I say.

He nods and smiles, but says nothing.

"Thank you, Mr. Stanton, for agreeing to meet with us like this... so soon after the funeral, I mean."

"Ah, well," he says innocently, "I figured people would be interested in my Uncle... but you've been the only ones so far. I don't know how much I can help. I've never been a comic book fan, and I was too young to remember his stories."

"Well," I say, "I'm working on a magazine of my own actually, and I was hoping to do an article about Irwin Roth. If you don't mind my asking you a few questions..."

"Not at all. But like I said, I don't know much."

"I'll start with the obvious. Did the family ever talk about what happened to Roth when he disappeared in the sixties? What he saw in the desert?"

"I'm afraid not," Stanton says, looking down. "I was very young then, and my parents really didn't talk about it. Irwin was rather aloof. He was only interested in subjects that he wrote about in his stories, and I think his siblings thought he was becoming a bit of a kook."

"What subjects in particular?"

"Oh, I don't know. Time travel, weird technologies, that sort of thing, I guess. Like I said, I was never very much interested in all of that stuff."

"How about Jack Sloane? Did you ever hear mention of him?"

"I don't know who that is."

"Can you tell me about Roth's time in San Francisco?"

"He began writing again. Mostly poetry, I think. Some articles for the paper. He was interested in those Beat people, or, at least, he knew some of them. And then he got caught up in the hippie thing, and we lost track of him again for a while. He was up north on a commune, I think, and then he came back to San Francisco and kept a low profile... picked up a writing job here and there... just getting by, you know. He was living in a residential hotel in the Tenderloin, when I invited him to come live out here with me."

"While he was here, did he talk to you about San Francisco?"

"No. Not at all. Like he wanted to leave it behind.

Although... every so often, I'd catch him talking on the phone to somebody he called Mr. George. Probably someone he knew from back in San Francisco. They talked about weird stuff, but he'd usually shut up when I came around. Once I heard him say something about anti-gravity. That stuck in my head. More of his science fiction stories, I thought.

"Mostly though, Irwin kept to himself. Read a lot." Again, he nods at the library book. My eye happens to pass over the papers sprawling out of the trash can.

"What's that?" I say, pointing to a stack of papers clipped together. The top sheet is marked *John Tern manuscript*. Fourth rewrite. Stanton looks at it nervously.

"Oh, that? Something my uncle was working on before he died."

"Really? He was still writing?"

"Well, no. I mean he didn't for a long time. But just a few months ago, he started working on that."

"If you're throwing it out, do you mind if I take it?"

Stanton's eyes brighten up, and he appears to make a quick calculation.

"I'll sell it to you. For... fifty dollars?"

"Fifty. Uh, I don't think I have that much. I have twenty I could give you right now."

We settle for thirty, which is all the cash I have in my pocket, and which seems to satisfy Stanton, who asks us, as another condition of the purchase, to drive him down to the liquor store.

It's a standard Pretzel ride with rotating 'spinner' cars. The façade is done up like a prison hulk... old disused ships, demasted and used as floating prisons by the British after they could no longer send convicts away to the American colonies. The hulk sits above a loading platform and rocks slowly, giving the impression that it's afloat. The sounds of beams creaking, water lapping and a foghorn are piped through speakers fixed to the top of the loading platform, which is dressed to resemble a dock. From barred portholes in the hulk, peer ghastly, tortured faces. On the waist of the ship, a skeletal figure brandishes a cat amidst a mass of tangled sheets and shrouds and ratlines. Presiding over all, from his vantage on the quarter deck, a ghostly captain stands, his skull-grin mocking from beneath a cocked hat and his blue uniform in undead tatters. A dead man in a gibbet swings in a mural painted on the wall behind the concrete loading platform. On the far right, cars emerge from a door and stop to unload their passengers. They travel across the platform, stop again to pick up new passengers, and then continue on.

# The Transparent

Swiveling around with a quick jerk, they burst through the entrance doors on the far left, and disappear into the blackened interior, leaving behind a quick snatch of screaming, which is cut off as the doors close behind them.

Tonight, the sky is perfect and calm- a deep blue awning above the neon lights that flicker to life all around us. Nicky and I stand, gazing up at the facade of Deadman's Dock. I smell the grease from the swivel cars as they make their characteristic clicking sound against the track.

A member of the North America Dark Ride Enthusiasts Society, Nicky fills me in on the ride's history.

"This was themed by Ken Abbott. One of the last rides he did. He was one of the greats. What not many people know, though, is what a scholar he was... for one thing, a leading authority on Penny Dreadfuls... in particular, the stories of Jocasta Wintern. He based a lot of the stunts he designed on illustrations from her stories."

I turn to look at him.

"The NADRES newsletter is very informative. I didn't even know what a Penny Dreadful was before I joined. Or a hulk."

Nicky clears some phlegm from his throat and takes a drag of his cigarette.

"Abbott's first big ride was the Jersey Devil. He did that one for Westwood Park out in New Jersey. So, thirty bucks for an old man's weak, last effort? I hope it was worth it."

"Are you kidding? I would have paid a lot more."

I look at the figure with the cat-o-nine-tails.

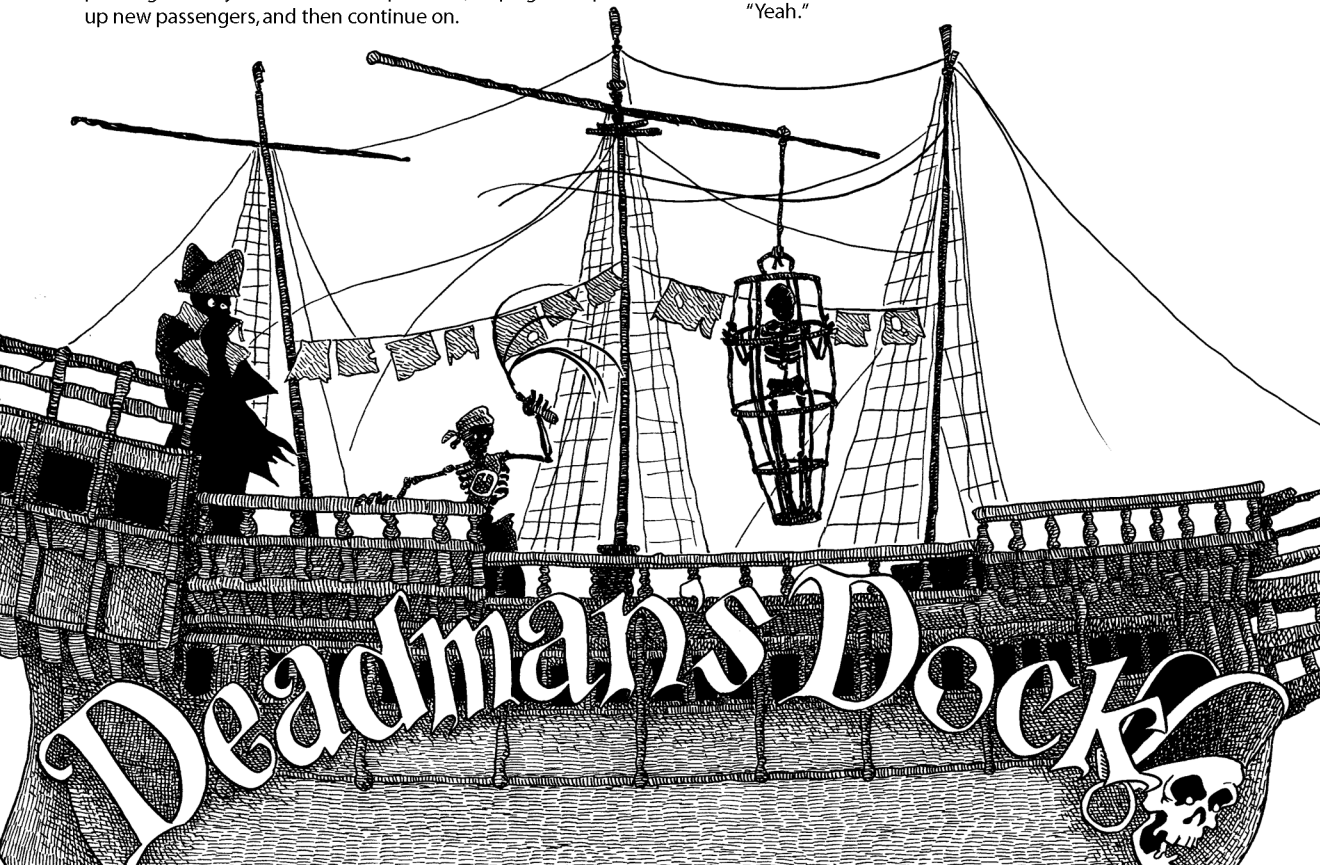
"You know Stella has a show this Friday. I told her we'd be there."

"OK."

Nicky takes a final drag and then throws his cigarette to the ground and grinds it under his shoe.

"You wanna go on this, then?" he says, pointing to the loading platform.

"Yeah."





# The Transparent

I knew Stella before she was Fairy Peril. Back then, she was Cassandra, and was stripping at bachelor parties, private parties and such. I don't remember when she moved into the house across the street from ours. We didn't even notice her until Nicky, who was visiting one day, announced to Angela and I that he'd just been over there buying acid from her.

Stella lived in the basement, the floor of which was always littered with aborted attempts at a truly awful comic book she was trying to put together. Her room-mate at the time was a hulking, gentle idiot named Ken, who always seemed to be parked in the pine green upholstered chair, watching basketball games on the television, with the volume up exceedingly loud. That may have been the reason why Stella chose to stay in the basement. Ken disappeared, eventually, but Stella continued to live in the basement, and every time I came to visit, the basketball game would still be blaring to the empty chair, like some sort of shrine to Ken's absence.

Angela seemed convinced early on that I had it in mind to fuck Stella. To be honest, I never really considered it. It's funny- there were always plenty of women in my life for whom I entertained incredibly devious, lustful fantasies, but it was for Stella that Angela picked up a vibe. There was one time, actually, when things became... questionable.

I was at a bachelor party, at a frat house... normally something I would consider horrifying, but I was there because it was my friend getting married and his frat bothers were throwing the party. In walks two strippers, and they begin doing their act, and I realize that one of them is 'Cassandra'. I don't recognize her at first because of the wig... and because I've never seen her naked before. As she comes near I can tell that she recognizes me too and she smiles- that sort of smile when you know you have something over someone else. She turns around, grinds her ass in my crotch, grabs my hand, places it on her breast and says,

"Your wife know what you're doing?"

"No. She's in New York this weekend," which is true.

"Well, you know what they say... when the cat's away..."

It was completely unerotic. She was obviously playing her character and I felt foolish and uncomfortable, and embarrassed anyway to be in the middle of a bunch of hooting frat boys- but turned on all the same.

We didn't become friends, really, until Angela decided she'd had enough of me and took off for California. Stella had begun transitioning from stripper to performance artist/dancer, and had turned most of her house into a studio where she built her props and made her costumes.

Despite her lack of talent as a cartoonist, she was an incredibly crafty person. She taught herself to sew and to use carpentry tools for her set props. I was quite impressed and I rather enjoyed going over to visit to see what she was working on and to talk with her about various things. She told me she was descended from royalty- the Spanish Habsburgs- and she knew quite a bit about folklore, which she worked into her act.

"The *Tuatha Dé Danann* were a race of people who ruled ancient Ireland," she said, as she ate a rocket-pop, her favorite snack. "They were tall and very powerful... skilled in magic. But over time, they degenerated and became known as *Sithe* and went below the ground to live. People still believe they're there, that they're the fairy folk. But far from being the quaint little creatures the Victorians imagined fairies and elves to be, they're still quite powerful and often dangerous. That's how I came up with the name Fairy Peril."

As time went on, she seemed to be using the acid, which she claimed gave her the inspiration she needed for her acts, more and more as an alcoholic uses alcohol. She always seemed to be tripping when I came to visit and didn't seem to be getting as much work done. I began visiting less and less, eventually only stopping by to get some acid for Nicky or myself, and I felt bad.

Friday, June 22.

The lights in the room come down from their normal dimness, which seems to hide the grime, to a near black, and we sit there for the few seconds as we hear the curtains of the stage being drawn. Then a red stage light illuminates an orchestra of automatons, seated behind big band-style music stands, all dressed in matching jackets. At first, I think of Johnny Dupree, as this orchestra is similarly made up exclusively of monkeys, but they are larger, more than toys, and each with a different instrument... a proper orchestra. There are muted titters from the audience.

They jerk to life, right on the first note of a barely audible opening. It is not much more than a pulse, a simple train of notes, creating a rhythm with their syncopation. It is an unusual time signature and I find myself preoccupied trying to count the beats within the measures.

The monkeys rock and sway as they mime their instruments, moving in time as though synced up, in their matching crimson orchestra jackets, like a simian Lawrence Welk Show. And then, as if that thought had somehow managed to knock down some stone wall between abstract reality and our own untidy, smelly, gooey, sensual one, and emerge howling screams of birthpangs, soap bubbles appear from some secret source in the dim and float out, above our heads, popping sometimes where they land- on the floor, on a table, someone's head, in someone's drink- and sometimes not, just bobbing in soapy, jelly-like unrigidness, tempting a poking finger to pop it back into abstraction.

The bare overture ended, a side curtain swooshes aside to the crash of a cymbal and there stands the *Salome of the South Side*, who begins to dance...

The bearded man on the television is speaking and I listen with half a mind as I gaze out the window at the checker-board river.

I click the remote several times to no effect. After three minutes of listening to the noise, the words which are not words, but sounds without semantic weight, I lift myself from the bed and plod the three steps to the television and turn the power switch.

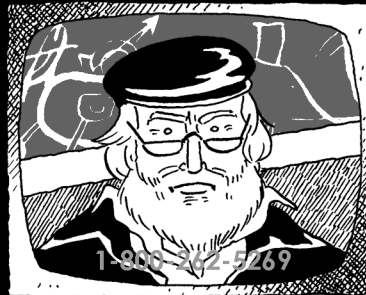
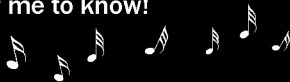
The sound stops instantly and the image on the screen quickly reduces to a pinpoint of blue light, which fades slowly from the center of the cathode tube. I watch it mesmerized as it fades smaller and smaller, like Zeno's paradox, and I feel instinctively that it's still there, although I can no longer see it. Then I shake my head from the screen and turn with a jerk to a stack of magazines and newspapers lying on the bedside table. A particular bundle strikes my attention. It is marked on top, *John Tern Manuscript. Fourth Rewrite*. The light doesn't seem to bother Stella, she's fast asleep, so I pick up the manuscript and start to read.



I want to know-a-know-know  
that Jesus welcomes me there,  
I do not want-a-want-want  
to be denied!



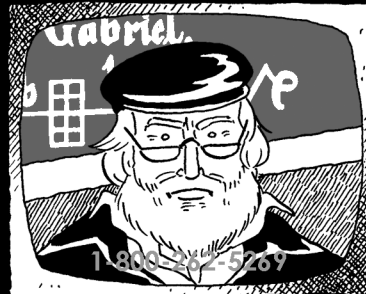
Let me live, let me live  
in that city so fair,  
that's enough, that's enough  
for me to know!



Now we can sit here all night. It  
don't make no difference to  
me. I'm ready to teach on Janic  
of Effizo and the so-called  
pseudoscience of besometrics  
but I don't hear those phones  
ringin'!



It's a matter of you showing  
respect for this ministry and  
my teaching. That's all it is. I  
can sit here or I can just go  
home. Now if you're interested  
in what I've got to say, you  
need to GET ON THOSE  
PHONES!



Play I Wanna Know!

llllll.... I want to know  
I want to know that Jesus wel-  
comes me there,  
I do not want, I do not want to  
be denied...




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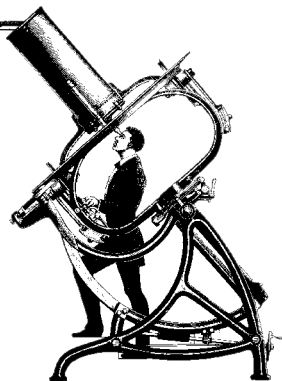


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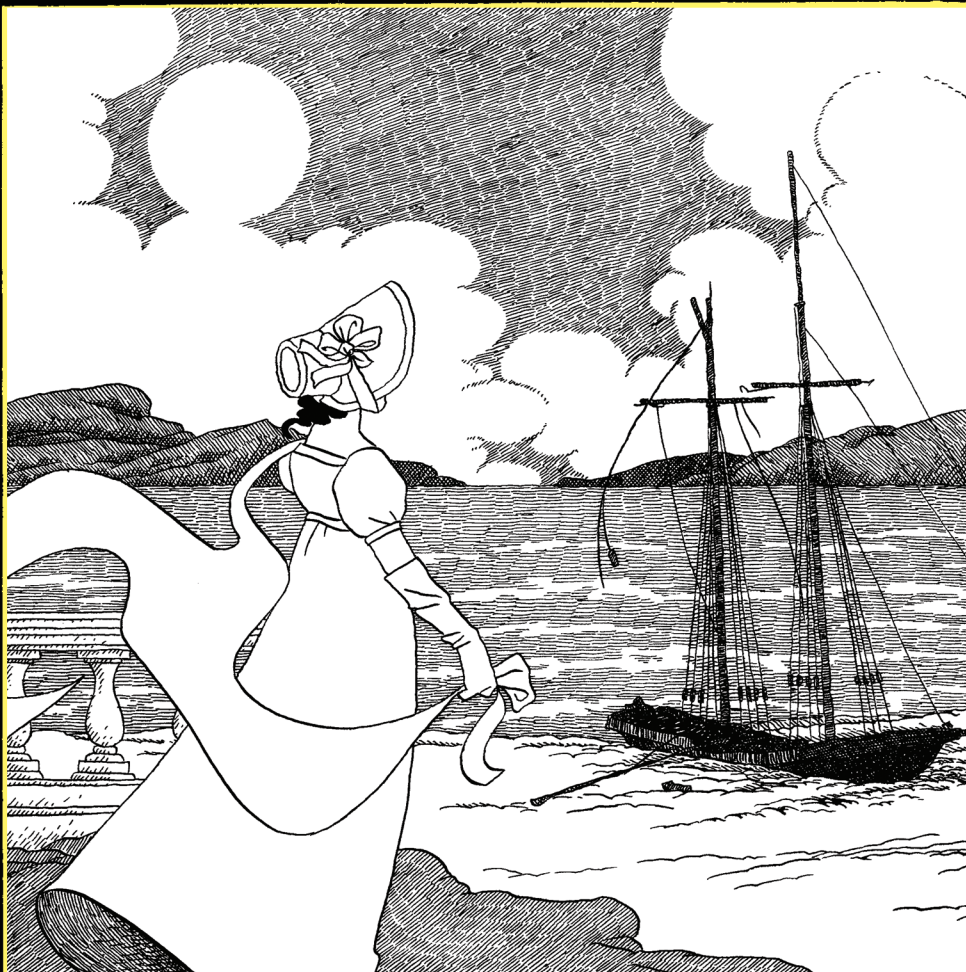
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**About the author:** A native of Pennsylvania, Sean C. Chiki lives in San Francisco with his wife and three cats. Together, they write, draw, play songs and collect more books than they have room in their house to keep.



The veil of dusk draped the horizon in hues of deep pink, in which was set a gem of blood red, casting its last radiance upon the dying day. The air was chill and salty and Violet filled her lungs with its bracing draught as she stepped along the crumbling balustrade, which guarded the edge of the gardens from the drop of cliff overlooking the sea. On the stony beach below rose the gray shape of a sloop's wreckage, having lain there for months now, and this ghostly hulk put into her mind troubling thoughts of Edmunds approaching voyage to arctic waters and the uncertainty of their future days.

-*A Feast at Midnight*, Jocasta Wintern, 1844 Jas. Langley Pubn.

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