

Wunderkammer

no. 3
fall 2010



CHIKI'10

THE FLYING DUCHESS STARLING HALL THE TRANSPARENT

Auk Brand Comics, San Francisco

WESTPHALIA CHAPTER

ANTI-GRAVITY LEAGUE 1953 - BERWICK, PA



WOLFE GARIEPY



WALTER SIKES
TREASURER



WINSLEY
PRESI



BENJAMIN AGAR



IRVING T. WISE



ARISTIDE POPE



AMBROSE STRINDBERG



THOMAS A. MASON



HENRY M. MALONE



CALEB VAN DOREN



RAYMOND



RICHARD S. SHAVER



NELSON CUSHING



STEBEN FINCH



DRATON SPAHR



CLIFFORD CROUSE



ALBERT CSIKI



MERRICK YARBRO



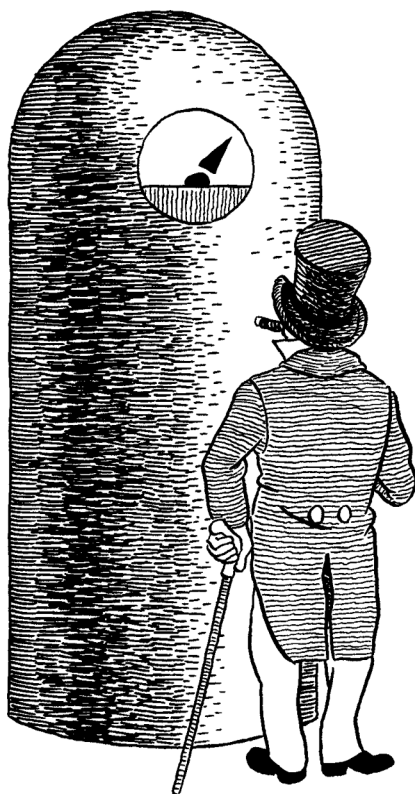
ERIC U

WUNDERKAMMER

Three

by

Sean C. Chiki



Auk Brand Comics

San Francisco

2010

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 Gopur, 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 Gopuri 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 Gopuri intervention. It was rumored that Sarmacia 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 client state. The Tsarate claimed no involvement in the affair and an uneasy peace between the two powers held for the time being. There were also rumors of O.T.C. involvement, despite certain prohibitions to which they were bound by the Charters of Union.

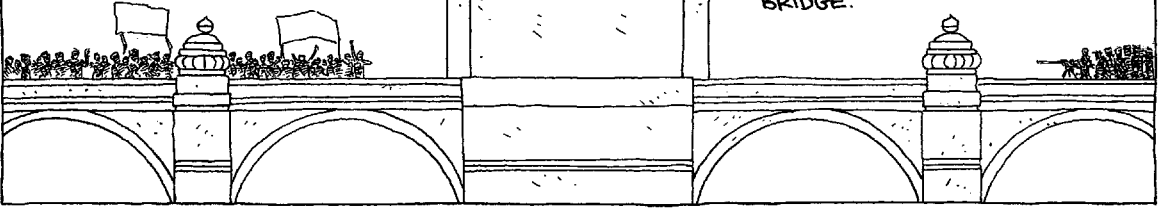
Yet despite this display of Union-backed, Gopuri hegemony in the region, there were already signs of growing strains within the area of its influence. This was of course to come into full bloom with events in Gopur itself, a few years later and *that* was commonly understood as the beginning of the fragmentation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

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

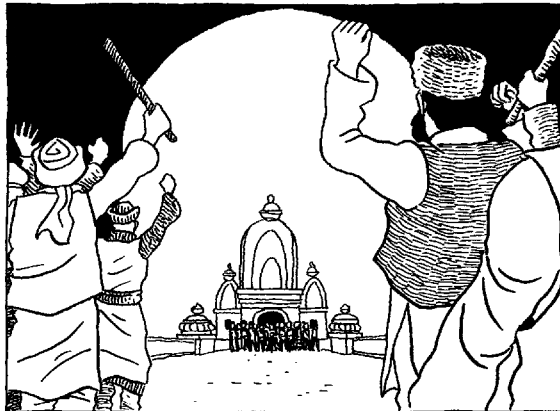


City of Vaneswar, Gopur
4172 n.c.

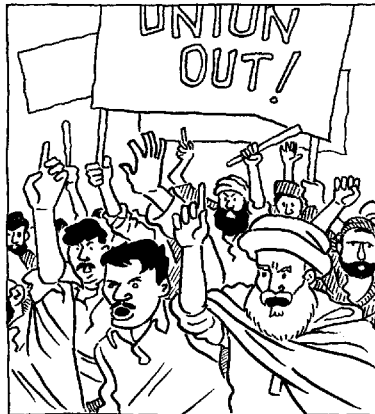
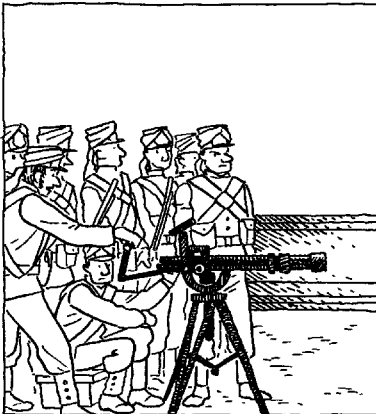
WE'D BEEN RUNNING ACROSS THE LOWER CITY. RIOTS HAD ERUPTED WITH REGULARITY EVER SINCE THE SACKING OF THE RESIDENCY, A FEW DAYS BEFORE. AT THE MAIDAN, WE FELL IN WITH A PROTEST MARCH HEADING FOR THE INDERGATE BRIDGE.



MY LUNGS WERE NEAR TO BURSTING FROM RUNNING AND ALL THE DUST I'D INHALED. IT LOOKED AS THOUGH WE'D MAKE IT OUT OF THE CITY. WHEN I WAS CONFRONTED WITH A SICKENING SIGHT- AT THE OTHER END OF THE BRIDGE, A LINE OF UNION TROOPS, CALLED IN, APPARENTLY AT THE REQUEST OF THE RESIDENT.



THEIR WHITE CROSS-BELTS FLASHED IN THE SUN AND THE BLUE OF THEIR UNIFORMS - UNION BLUE THEY CALLED IT... THEY'D EVEN TAKEN A PATENT OUT ON ITS MANUFACTURE¹ - THAT DISTINCTIVE COLOR TRIGGERED SOMETHING IN ME. IT WASN'T THE FIRST, OR THE LAST TIME I THOUGHT I WAS DEAD. BUT IT'S FUNNY WHAT RAN THROUGH MY MIND AT THAT MOMENT...

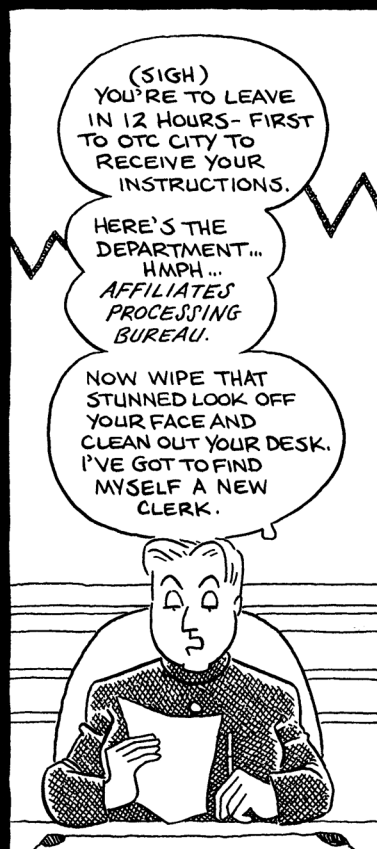


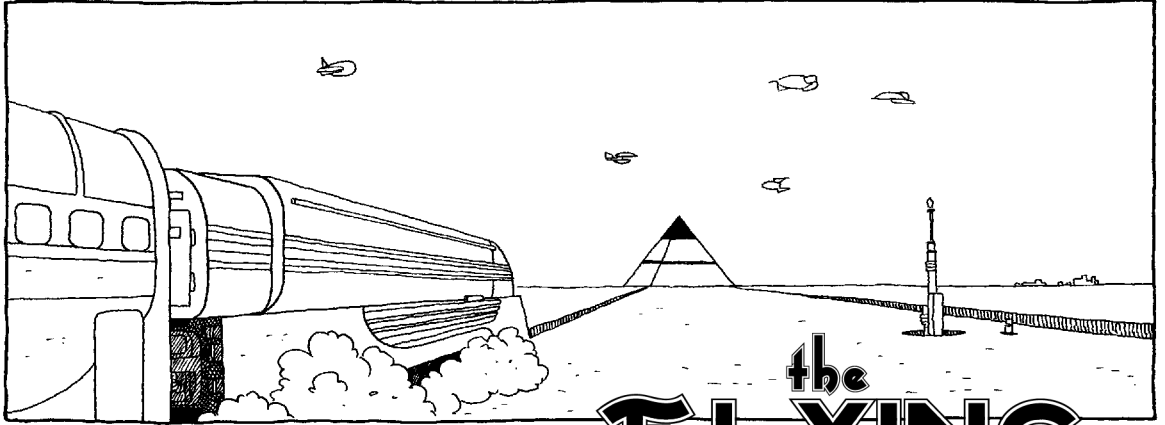
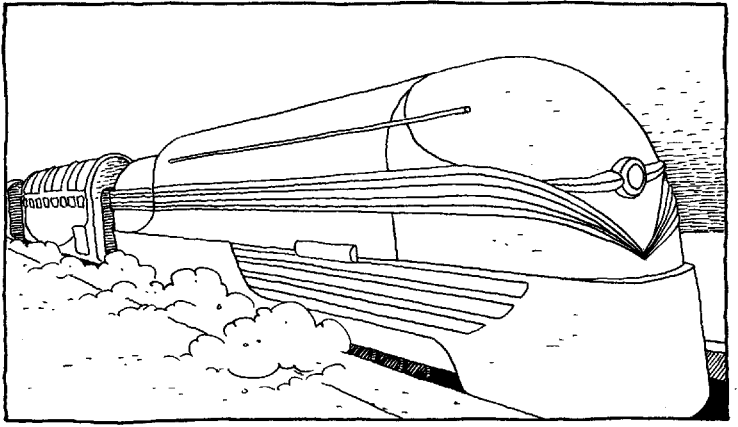
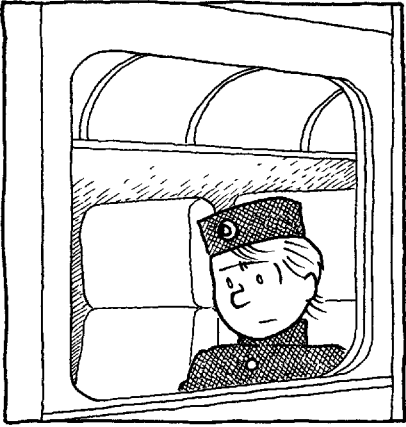
WITH EVERYTHING GOING ON AROUND ME, THE ONLY THING I REMEMBER CLEARLY WAS HOW MUCH I USED TO LIKE THE SWEET ROLLS THEY SERVED AT THE FLEET ACADEMY CANTEEN.

BUT THEN, PALAAV DID SOMETHING THAT CHANGED EVERYTHING ...

One week earlier...

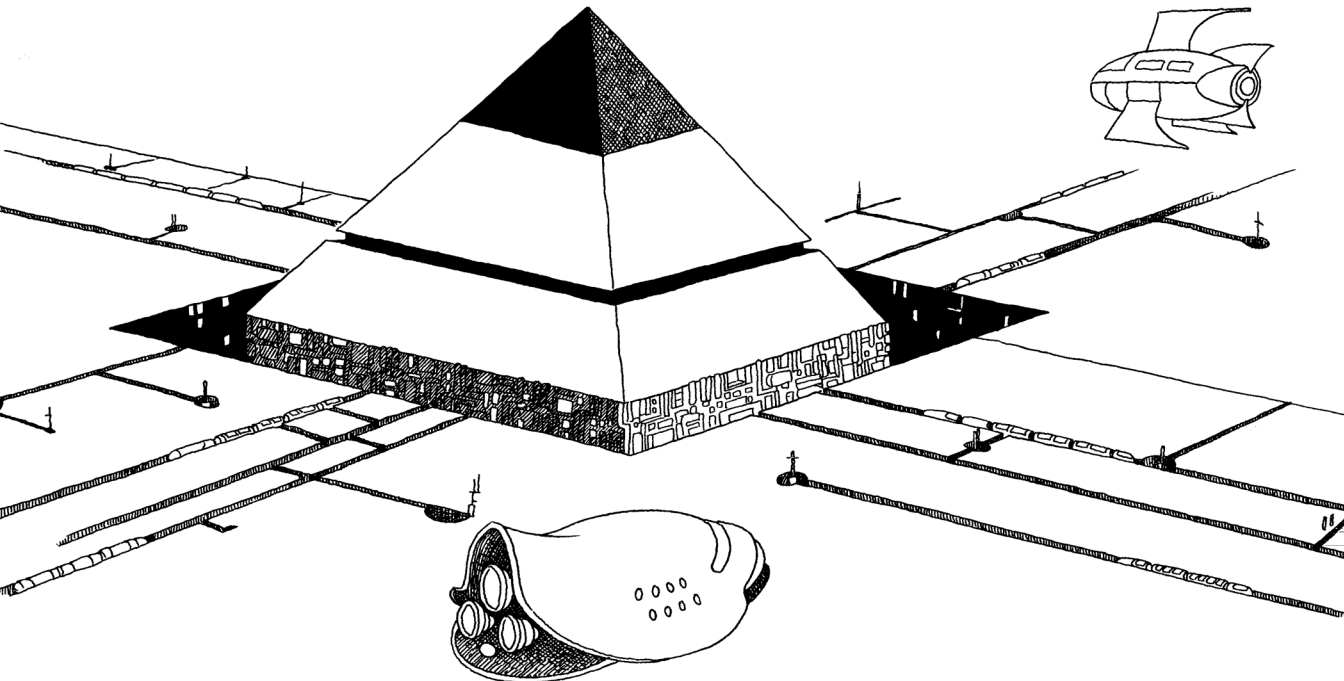
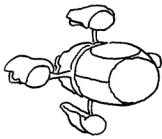
AFTER MARTIN'S TRIAL, I DECIDED I'D HAD ENOUGH OF FLEET, SO I RESIGNED MY COMMISSION AND JOINED THE RESIDENCY SERVICE. I SPENT THE NEXT THREE YEARS PUSHING PENCILS IN SUCH GLAMOROUS PLACES AS MUELLEN AND LAS PUERCAS. DURING THAT TIME, WHETHER IT WAS OUT OF BOREDOM, OR MELANCHOLY, I PICKED UP ONE OR TWO OF MARTIN'S BAD HABITS... PARTICULARLY WHERE THEY CONCERNED THE BOTTLE. IT WAS WITH SOME RELIEF, AS WELL AS WITH SOME BEWILDERMENT THEN, THAT I RECEIVED THE NOTICE FROM MY STATION CHIEF THAT I WAS BEING MOVED TO A DIFFERENT DEPARTMENT.

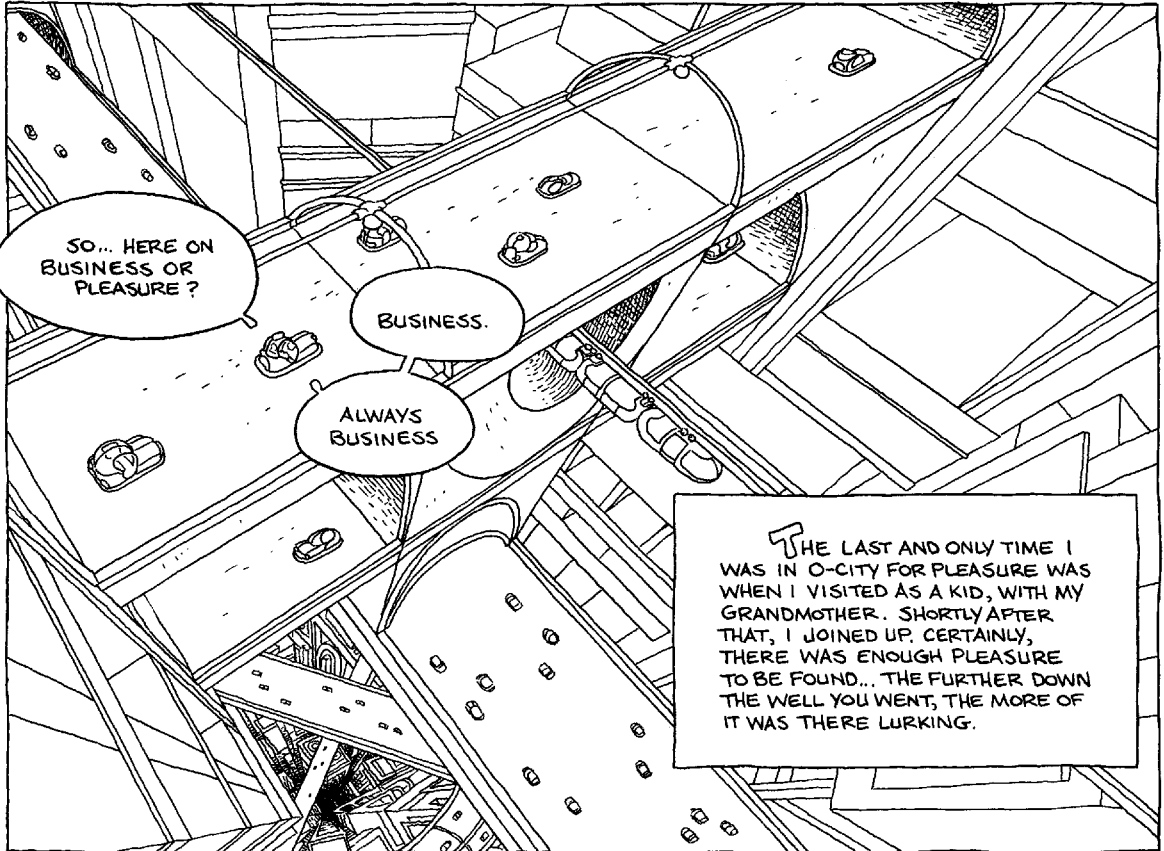
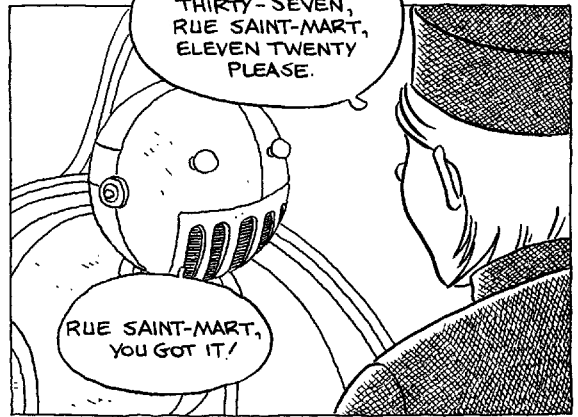
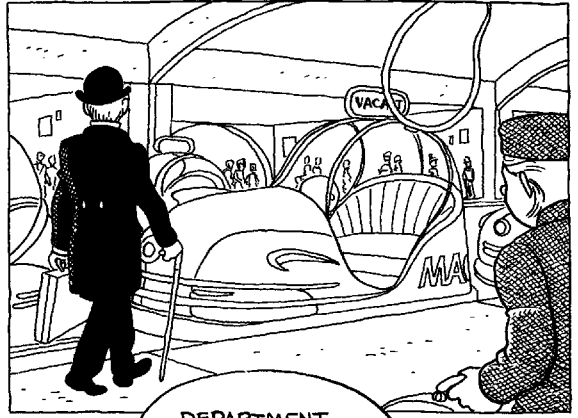
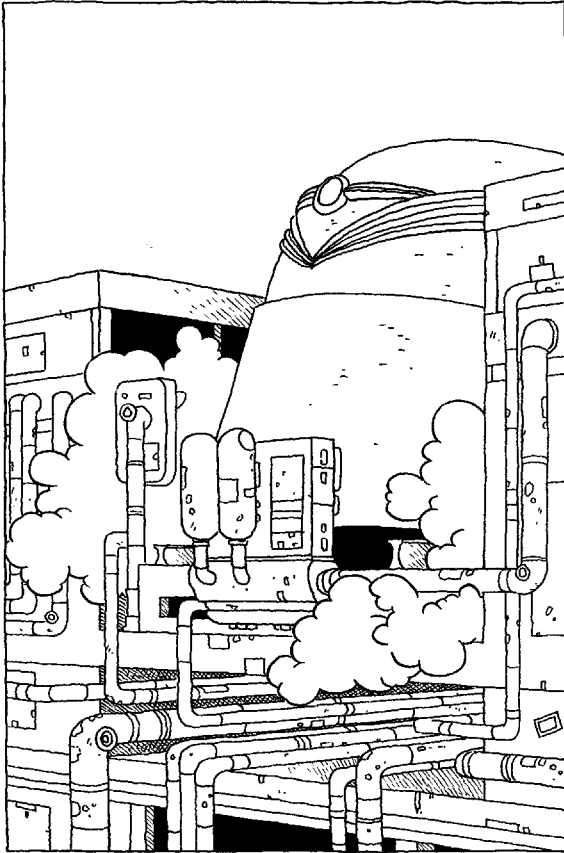


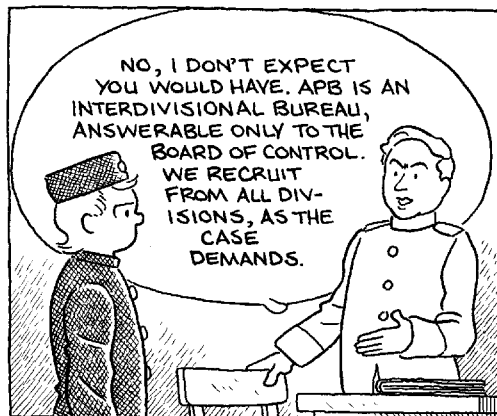
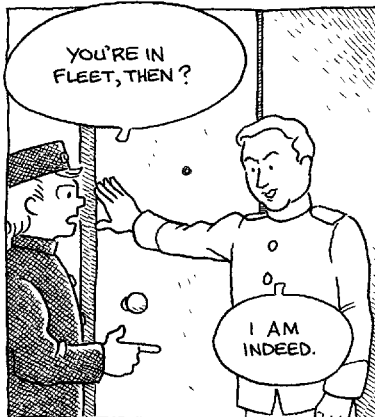
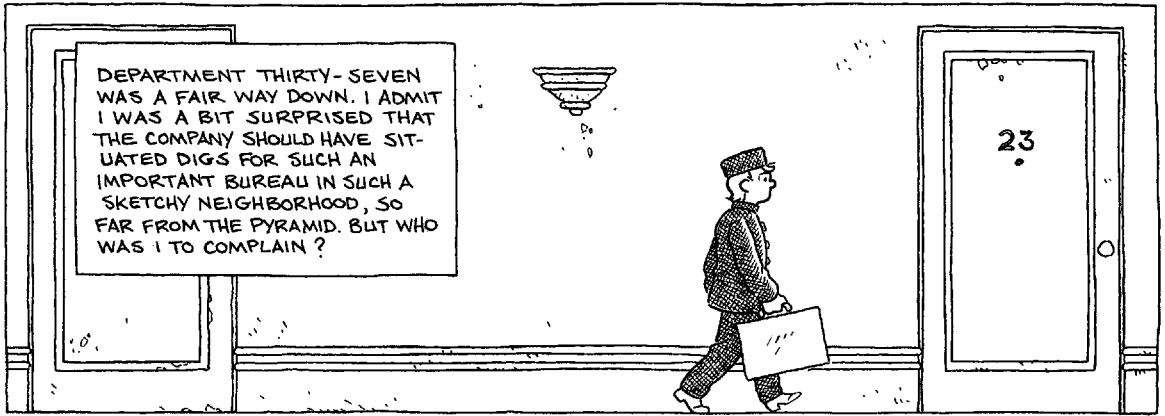


the FLYING DUCHESS

Chapter three: Divisions





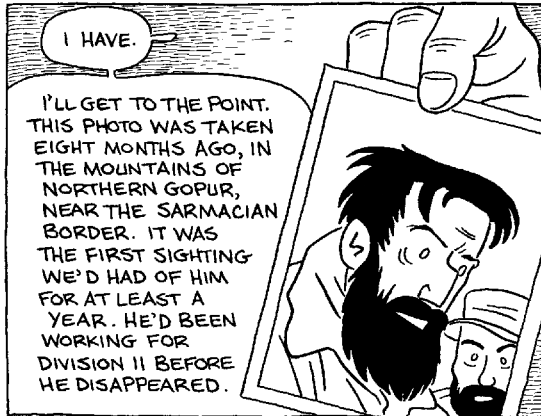




MARTIN ALWAYS SEEMED A BIT ODD TO ME. THAT WAS PART OF HIS CHARM.

LOOK...

THEY COVERED ALL THIS AT THE TRIAL. HAVEN'T YOU SEEN THE TRANSCRIPTS?



I HAVE.

I'LL GET TO THE POINT. THIS PHOTO WAS TAKEN EIGHT MONTHS AGO, IN THE MOUNTAINS OF NORTHERN GOPUR, NEAR THE SARMACIAN BORDER. IT WAS THE FIRST SIGHTING WE'D HAD OF HIM FOR AT LEAST A YEAR. HE'D BEEN WORKING FOR DIVISION II BEFORE HE DISAPPEARED.



DIVISION II?

THE COMPANY ONLY HAS TEN DIVISIONS.



ERM... IN FACT, THERE ARE ELEVEN.²

THIS PHOTO SEEMS TO PROVE IT. BUT HE HAS DISAPPEARED AGAIN.

WE NOW BELIEVE HE'S CROSSED THE BORDER INTO SARMACIA. WE ALSO HAVE REASON TO BELIEVE THAT HE'S IN POSSESSION OF COMPANY PROPERTY... SOMETHING OF A VERY DELICATE NATURE. YOU ARE TO BE PART OF A TEAM, WHICH WILL FIND THE CAPTAIN AND ATTEMPT TO PERSUADE HIM TO RETURN. GIVEN YOUR EXPERIENCE WITH HIM, AND AS A PILOT, YOU'RE IDEALLY SUITED FOR THIS JOB. WE BELIEVE HE MAY STILL BE REASONED WITH. AND WE HAVE A GENEROUS OFFER FOR HIM.

IT'S NEVER BEEN LISTED IN THE ANNUAL REPORT... FOR GOOD REASONS BUT WE KNOW ALL ABOUT THEM. UNFORTUNATELY, AT TIMES, ITS POLICY AND GOVERNMENT POLICY ARE AT ODDS, AND THAT MAKES THINGS... DIFFICULT. BEING, AS WE ARE, HERE TO PROMOTE HARMONY BETWEEN GOVERNMENT, COMPANY, CHURCH, ETC., INTELLIGENCE CAME TO US THAT HE WAS WORKING WITH THE VANAKSHYAT.



AND IF HE CAN'T BE PERSUADED?

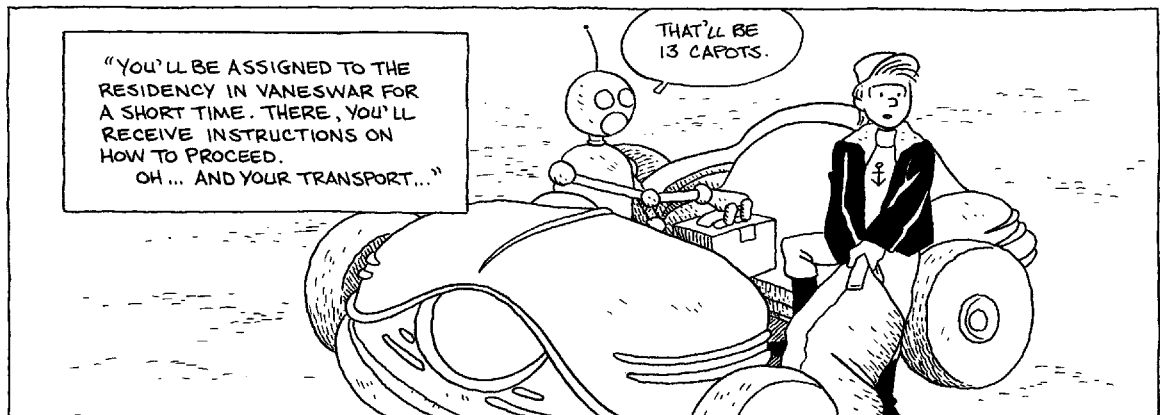
THE TEAM HAS ORDERS FOR THAT EVENTUALITY...

BUT THAT WON'T BE YOUR PROBLEM.

ANYWAY, WE'RE CONFIDENT THOSE MEASURES WON'T BE NECESSARY.

AS FOR YOU, WE'RE PREPARED TO RELIEVE ALL YOUR DEBTS, IMMEDIATELY, WHICH I UNDERSTAND ARE QUITE SUBSTANTIAL.

YOU'LL BE GIVEN LIEUTENANT'S RANK IN FLEET, ALSO EFFECTIVE IMMEDIATELY.

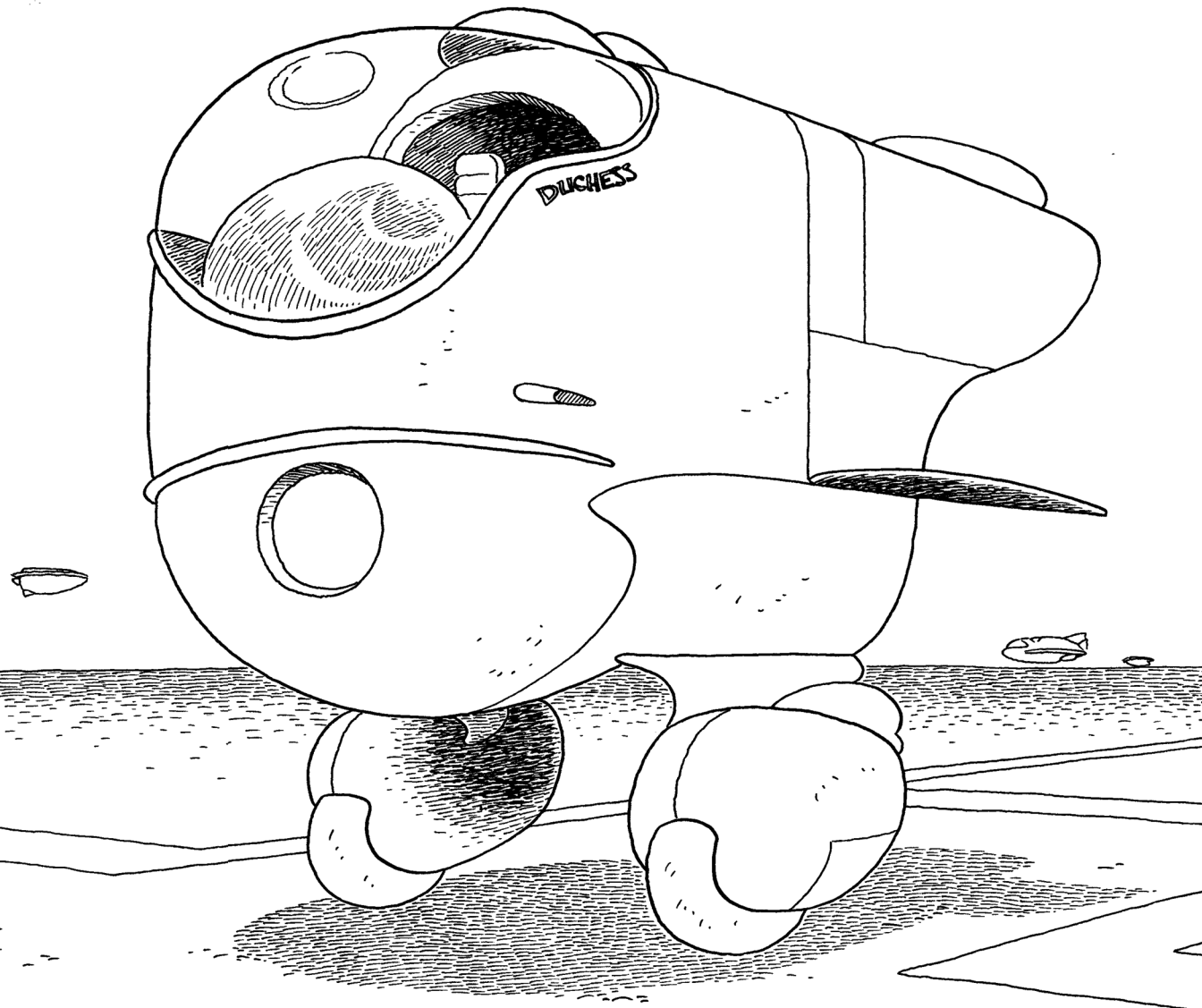


"YOU'LL BE ASSIGNED TO THE RESIDENCY IN VANESWAR FOR A SHORT TIME. THERE, YOU'LL RECEIVE INSTRUCTIONS ON HOW TO PROCEED. OH... AND YOUR TRANSPORT..."

THAT'LL BE 13 CAPOTS.

" I TRUST
IT WILL BE
ADEQUATE."

SHE WAS CALLED
THE DUCHESS ...



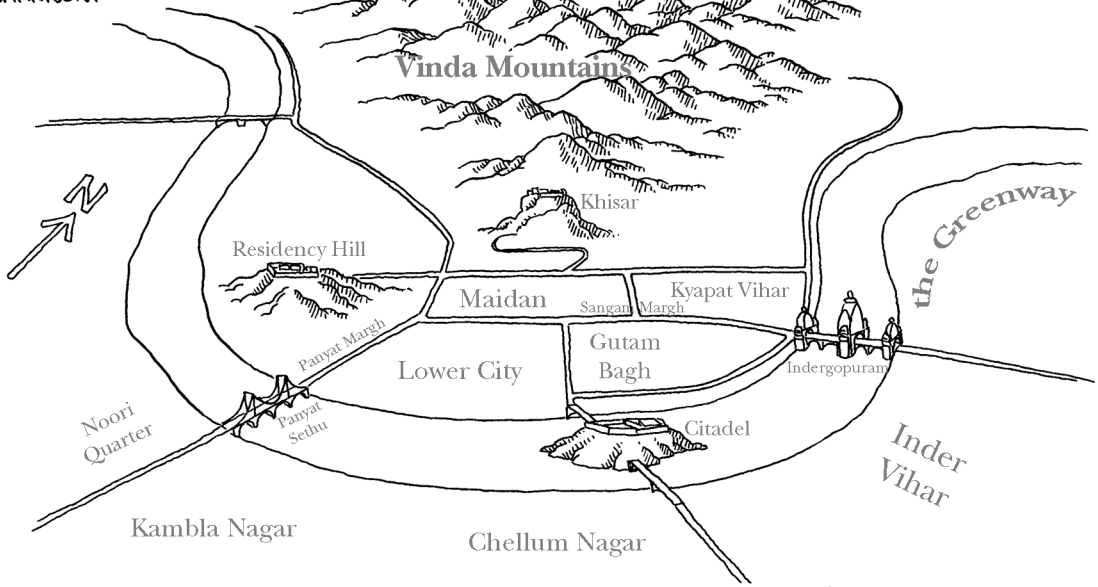
... AND SHE
WAS ALL MINE .



THANK YOU,
LIEUTENANT. HAVE
A NICE FLIGHT.



VANESWAR LAY NESTLED ALONG A BEND IN THE RIVER YULMANJA, AT THE END OF THE SOUTHERN ARM OF THE VINDAL RANGE, THOSE MOUNTAINS WHICH DOMINATE THE HIGHLANDS OF NORTHERN GOPUR AND THE TREACHEROUS BORDER REGION BETWEEN IT AND THE SARMACIAN TSARATE. THREE HILLS FORMED BOUNDARY POINTS FOR THE CITY PROPER. THE NORTHERN-MOST OF THESE WAS THE KHISAR AND UPON ITS LOFTY HEAD SAT A DAZZLING CROWN-THE PADMATMAHAL, PRINCIPAL RESIDENCE OF THE CHANDURAJ. BELOW THE KHISAR'S SOUTHERN SLOPE SPRAWLED A VAST AGORA, THE GRAND MAIDAN, WITH ITS BAZAARS AND GREEN SPACES AND GATHERING GROUNDS. TO THE WEST OF THE MAIDAN, AND JUST BY THE RIVER, WAS THE SECOND OF THE HILLS, THE SO-CALLED RESIDENCY HILL, GIVEN TO THE COMPANY BY THE CHANDURAJ. THE THIRD HILL ROSE FROM MIDSTREAM, JUST EAST OF THE RIVER'S SOUTHWARD CURVE. THIS WAS CALLED CITADEL, AS IT CONTAINED THE CITY'S GARRISON.

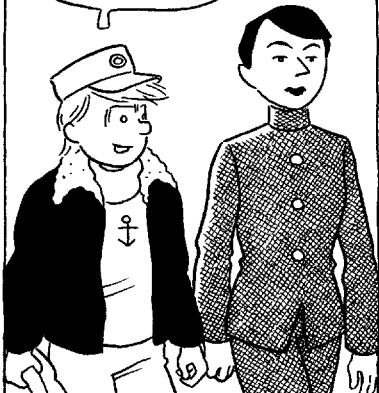


MY NEW "BOSS" FOR THE MOMENT, TURNED OUT TO BE NONE OTHER THAN MY OLD SCHOOL CHUM, ARTI.

SO... ASSISTANT TO THE RANKING COMPANY DIPLOMATIC REPRESENTATIVE. DESPITE OUR DIFFERENCES, ARTI, I MUST SAY I ADMIRE YOUR DRIVE.

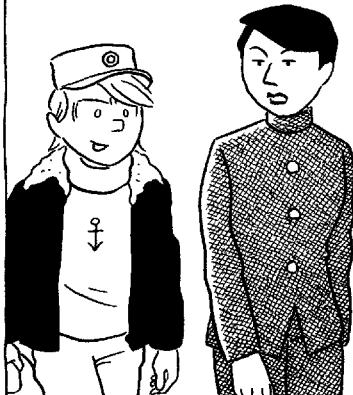
THANKS.

WELL, TELL ME ABOUT OUR NEW MASTER.



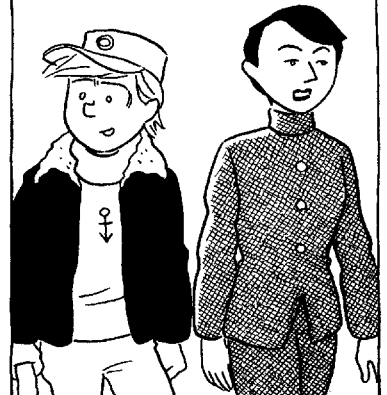
THE MAN'S A COMPLETE IDIOT. BUT YOU'LL SEE SOON ENOUGH. TOMORROW, WE'RE TO ATTEND A GALA RECEPTION IN HIS HONOR, AT PADMATMA HOUSE NO LESS. WE'LL ACCOMPANY MAJOR JARVIS IDEROD, FLEET ADJUNCT OFFICER TO THE RESIDENCY ... AND ANOTHER IDIOT.

STILL THE CHARMER, AIN'T YOU?



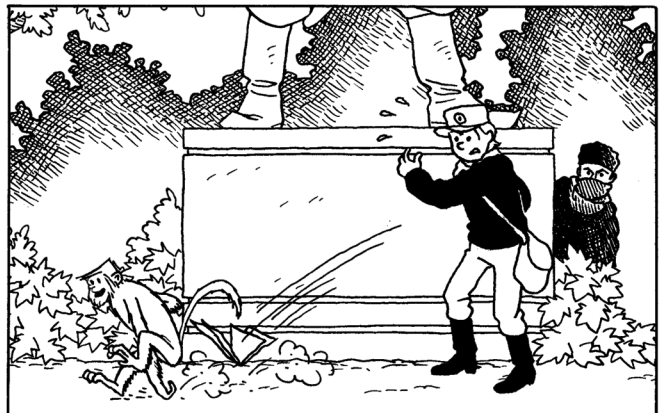
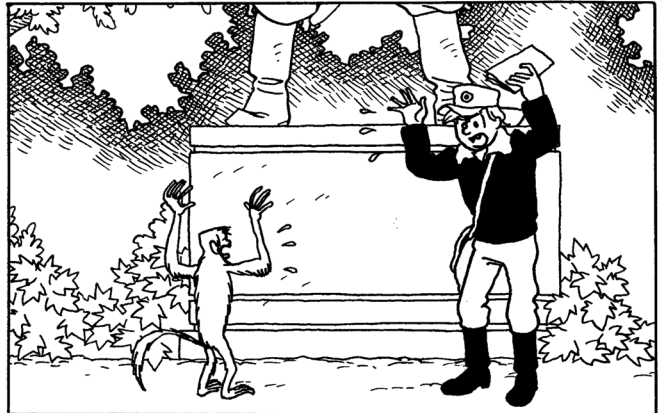
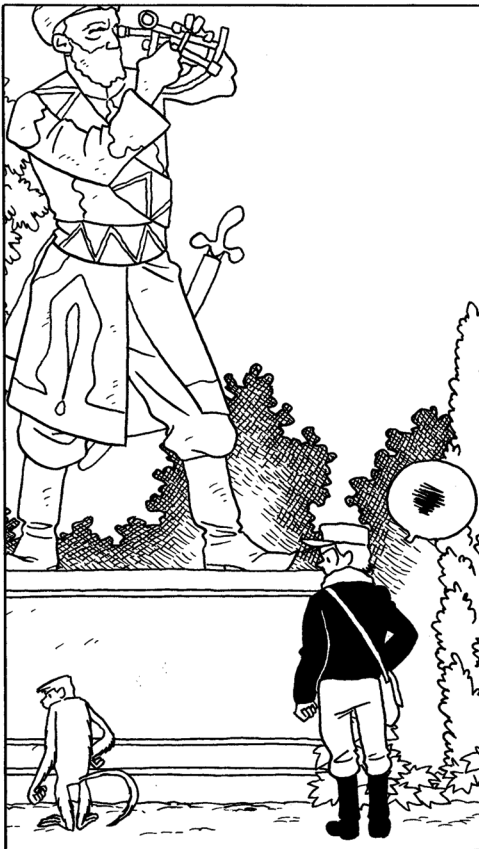
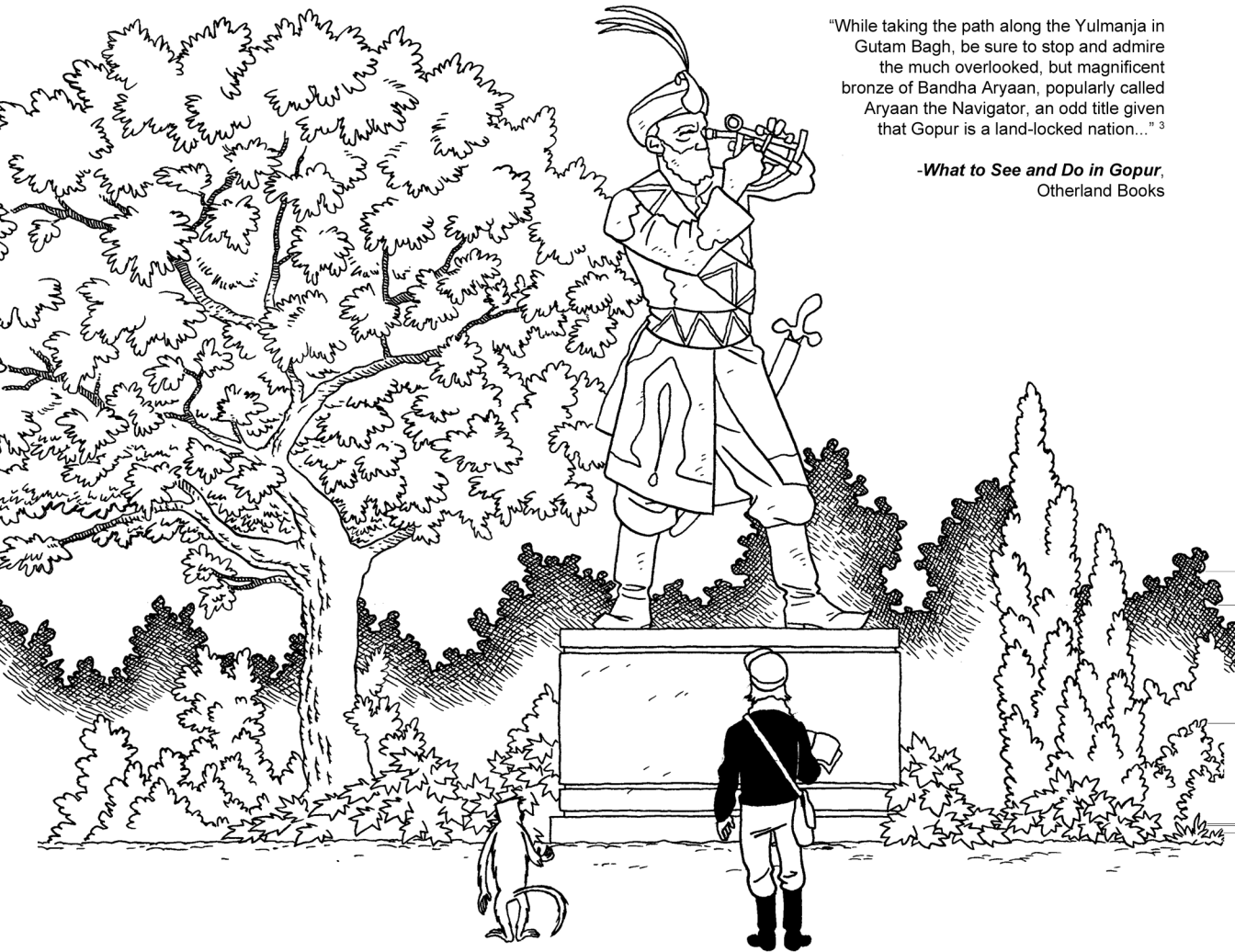
MAKE SURE YOU GET DOLLED UP IN YOUR BEST DRESS WHITES, THE CREAM OF GOPURI SOCIETY WILL BE IN ATTENDANCE ... INCLUDING YOUR CONTACT. UNTIL THEN, YOU CAN DO AS YOU LIKE. I'D SHOW YOU SOME SIGHTS, BUT I'VE GOT HEAPS OF WORK STILL TO DO.

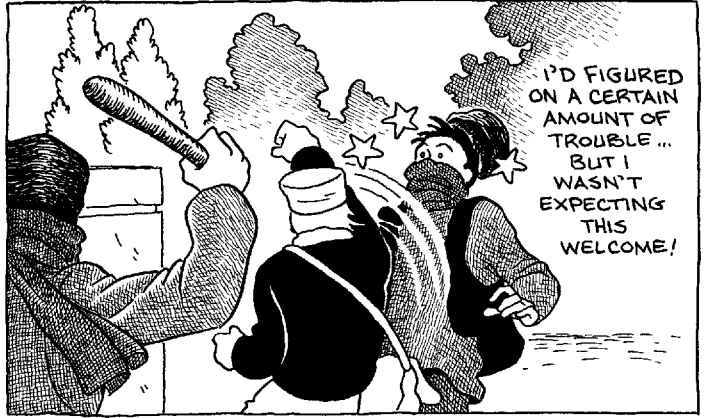
THAT'S OK. I CAN FIND MY WAY AROUND.



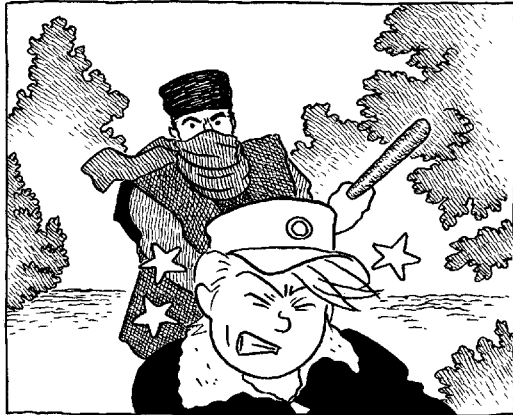
"While taking the path along the Yulmanja in Gutam Bagh, be sure to stop and admire the much overlooked, but magnificent bronze of Bandha Aryaan, popularly called Aryaan the Navigator, an odd title given that Gopur is a land-locked nation..."³

*-What to See and Do in Gopur,
Otherland Books*

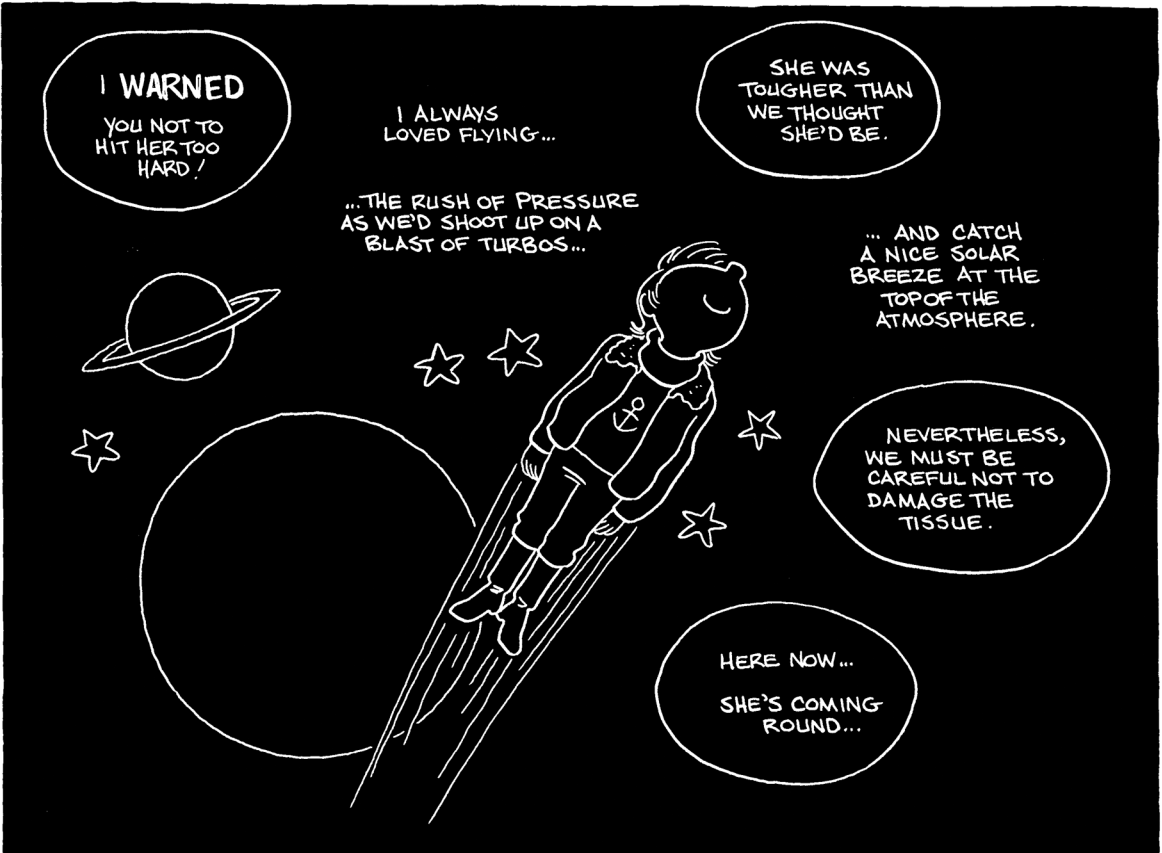




I'D FIGURED ON A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF TROUBLE ... BUT I WASN'T EXPECTING THIS WELCOME!



AND THEN,
AS THEY SAY,
EVERYTHING
WENT
BLACK.



I WARNED
YOU NOT TO
HIT HER TOO
HARD!

I ALWAYS
LOVED FLYING...

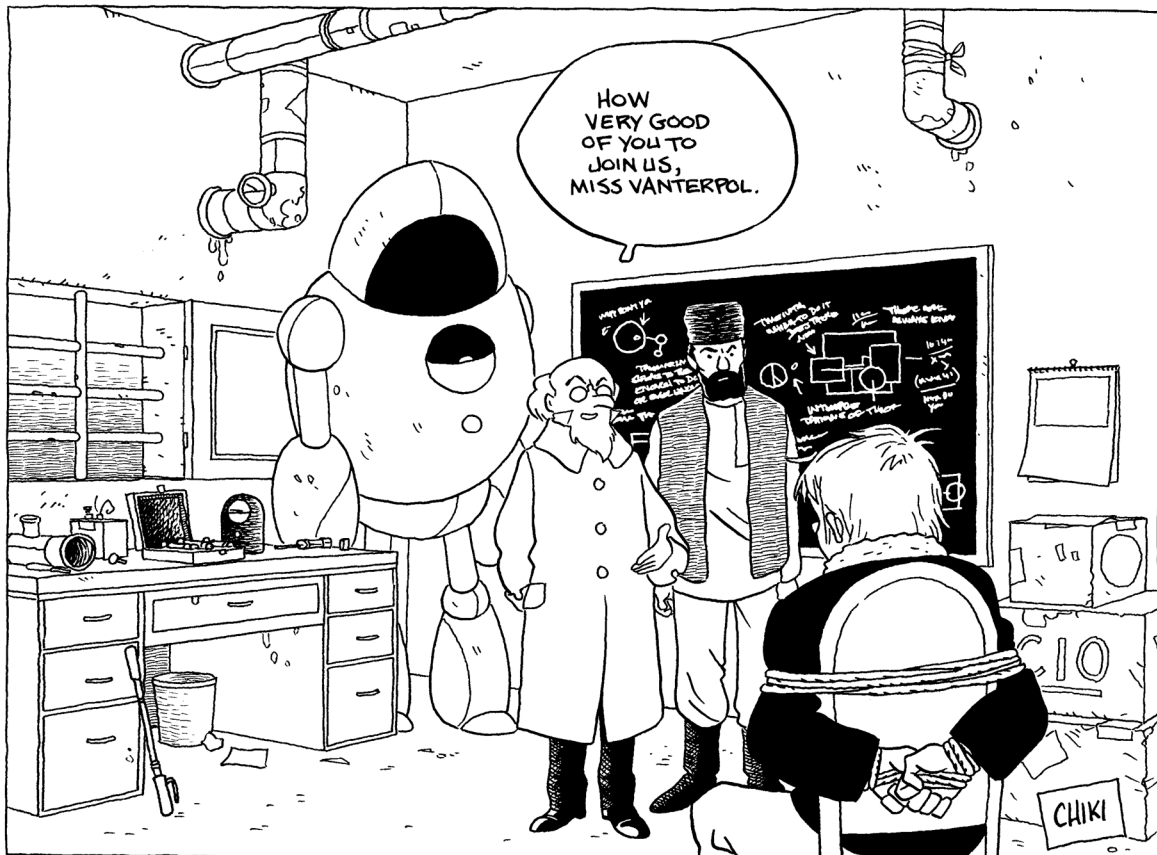
SHE WAS
TOUGHER THAN
WE THOUGHT
SHE'D BE.

...THE RUSH OF PRESSURE
AS WE'D SHOOT UP ON A
BLAST OF TURBOS...

... AND CATCH
A NICE SOLAR
BREEZE AT THE
TOP OF THE
ATMOSPHERE.

NEVERTHELESS,
WE MUST BE
CAREFUL NOT TO
DAMAGE THE
TISSUE.

HERE NOW...
SHE'S COMING
ROUND...



Notes

¹Jane is repeating a myth common in her day. The Union infantry experimented with a number of blue dyes, for which their uniforms became known, during the period of the Late Sovereignty, before finding one which was suitably weather and fade proof. This dye was Midnight Indigo 39, manufactured by Headstone Corp. (the editors)

²In fact, there were more. According to a report filed by an investigatory committee, on behalf of the Church of Ontology's Adjustments Directorate, at the time of the New Secession, there were upwards of two dozen 'unofficial' divisions and associated non-company-organizations floating about, the existence of which were "beyond the knowledge or recollection" of most members of the Board of Control. This was according to the minutes of the hearings held by Parliament's Committee on Subversive and Alien Acts and Subterfuges, chaired by Senator Lennox Baird Jansen. But more on these matters as Jane's story continues. (the editors)

³Otherland Books, an imprint of OTC Publishing, specialized in the type of travel and touring guides popular at the time. In fact, my own writing career began with a number of articles, written for a later edition of this very book. My most noteworthy contribution was the section on the Chattra Ghats. Eventually, I was given a series devoted to what were considered 'extreme locales'. The most popular of these was my account of living among the Avanyi of the Sarmacian tundra, *It's !*\$# Cold Up Here*. (J.V.)

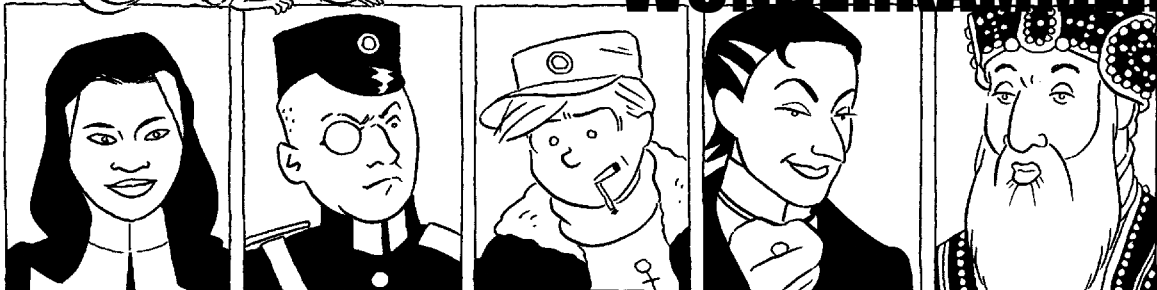


the Flying Duchess continues

in the next

exciting issue of

WUNDERKAMMER

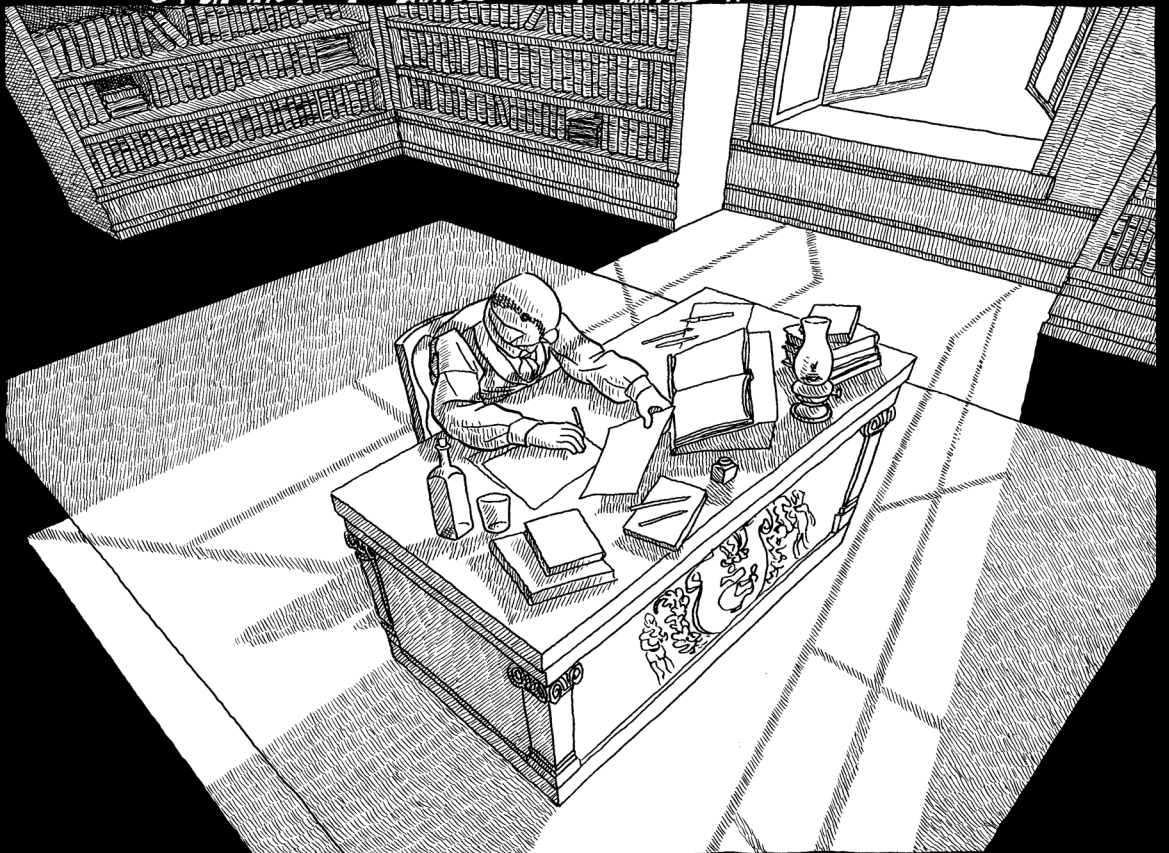


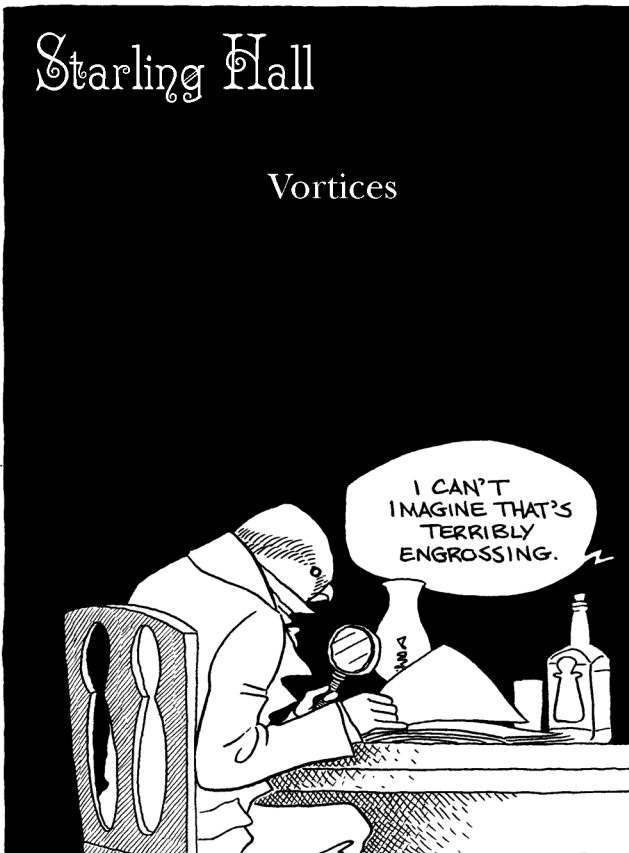
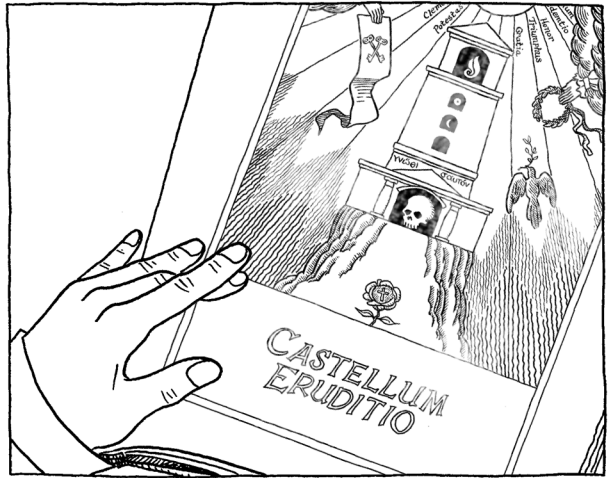
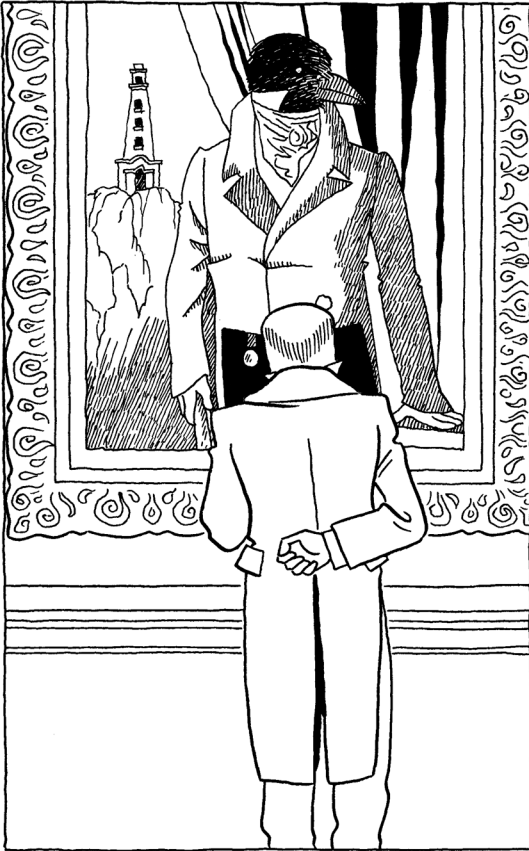


... visiting his estate
won't return for some weeks.
Dartwood have been at my disposal
to my every need.

Haven't been sleeping. The pictures have
taken hold of my mind in a queer way. I
dream without ever being asleep. Despite
this, I've managed to complete the drawings
for the second book.

Other work has taken a life of its own. There
are periods when I remember nothing
myself with a completed...





HE WAS SWEEPED UP IN THE REVOLUTIONARY FRENZY, LIKE MANY IN HIS DAY. AND, LIKE MANY, CAME TO DISILLUSIONMENT.

HE FELL BACK INTO THOSE STUDIES, WHICH CONSUMED SO MUCH OF HIS TIME FORMERLY. ALWAYS OBSESSED WITH HIS GREAT WHITE LODGE. WAS CONVINCED IT EXISTED. BUT YOU KNOW ALL THAT, I'M SURE, IF YOU'VE READ HIS NOTES. NO? WE HAVE THEM, OF COURSE. I'LL SHOW THEM TO YOU.

ANYWAY...

... AN OBSESSION THAT MY POOR, ILL-INFORMED, BUT ENTHUSIASTIC BROTHER HAS INHERITED... ALONG WITH MY GRANDFATHER'S LIBRARY... AND THAT BOOK.

IT WAS HANDED DOWN THROUGH THE FEMALE LINE, YOU KNOW. THAT'S HOW IT CAME TO THIS BRANCH OF THE FAMILY AND NOT THOSE UNFORTUNATE PENSHAWES. DO YOU KNOW WHAT MY FATHER'S RESPONSE WAS WHEN ASKED WHETHER HE GAVE ANY CREDENCE TO THE LEGENDS OF A CURSE?

"WELL SIR," HE SAID, "I SUPPOSE A MAN WOULD BE A FOOL NOT TO ADMIT THE POSSIBILITY OF THE EXISTENCE OF ANY FANTASTIC BOGEY, BUT HE WOULD BE A BIGGER FOOL STILL TO SET A PLACE FOR IT AT HIS TABLE."

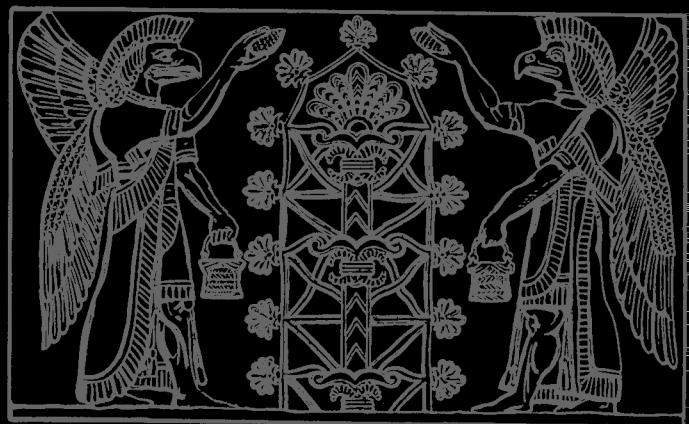
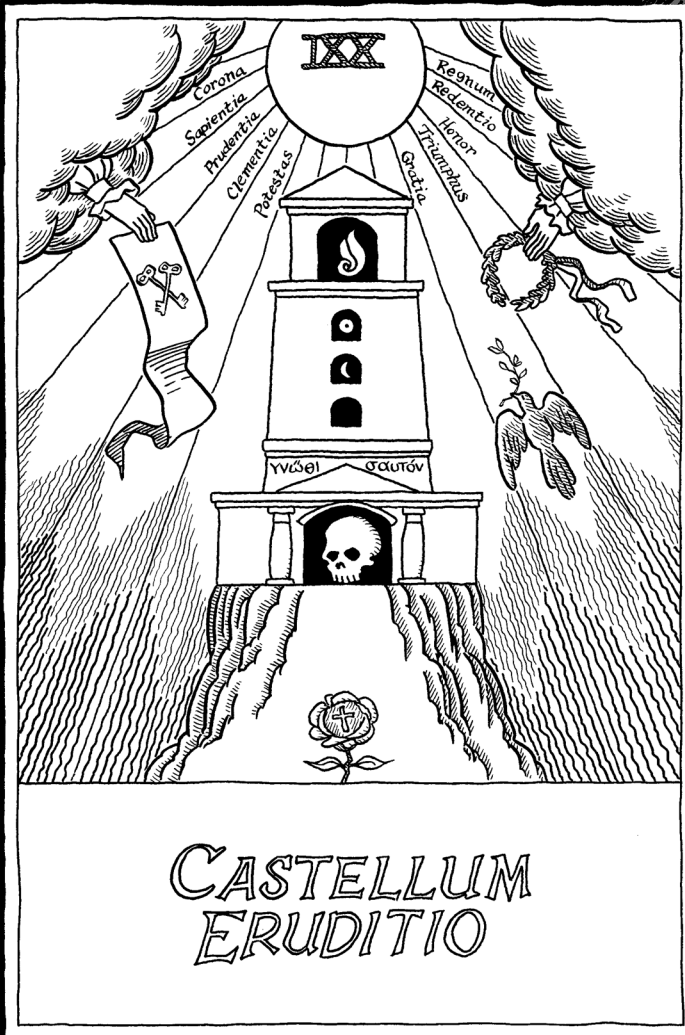
HE WAS A MAN NOT WITHOUT WIT, MY FATHER ... A VIRTUE THAT RARELY TRAVELED THROUGH THE MALE LINE IN OUR FAMILY, I REGRET TO SAY. BUT FOR ALL THAT, HE WAS ALSO A MAN GIVEN TO THE TENDENCY OF EXCESS. A MAN OF HIS TIME, YOU MIGHT SAY.

SO ALSO WAS MY GRANDFATHER, AND A MAN THOROUGHLY LACKING IN WIT, BY ALL ACCOUNTS. YOU COULD SAY HE WAS A SORT OF FOOLISH GENIUS. AND THE FOLLY BY WHICH HE IS BEST KNOWN IS, WITHOUT A DOUBT, THAT TOWER.

"HE WAS A GREAT LOVER OF HIS OWN CLEVERNESS AND HAD IT PAINTED INTO THE BACKGROUND OF ALMOST EVERY PORTRAIT. IT BECAME SO FIRMLY ASSOCIATED WITH THE FAMILY, THAT OTHERS BEGAN USING THE DEVICE. IT WAS COMMONLY MISTAKEN FOR A LIGHTHOUSE, PERHAPS BECAUSE THERE WERE SO MANY SAILORS IN THE FAMILY."



“There has always been a controversy between the two schools of thought. My grandfather believed, of course, that the Beson Field could be observed in the air. He didn't leave us much in the way of his own theories, however. We've had to piece together what we have to work with- marginalia, a few messy sketches. His journals are, for the most part, given over to his rather insipid musings on more worldly things. No, I sometimes think that all that stuff was a blind, that he was hiding his really important work, that if we could just read between the lines... but then I think that he probably really wasn't that subtle of mind anyway. I suppose we shall never know.”

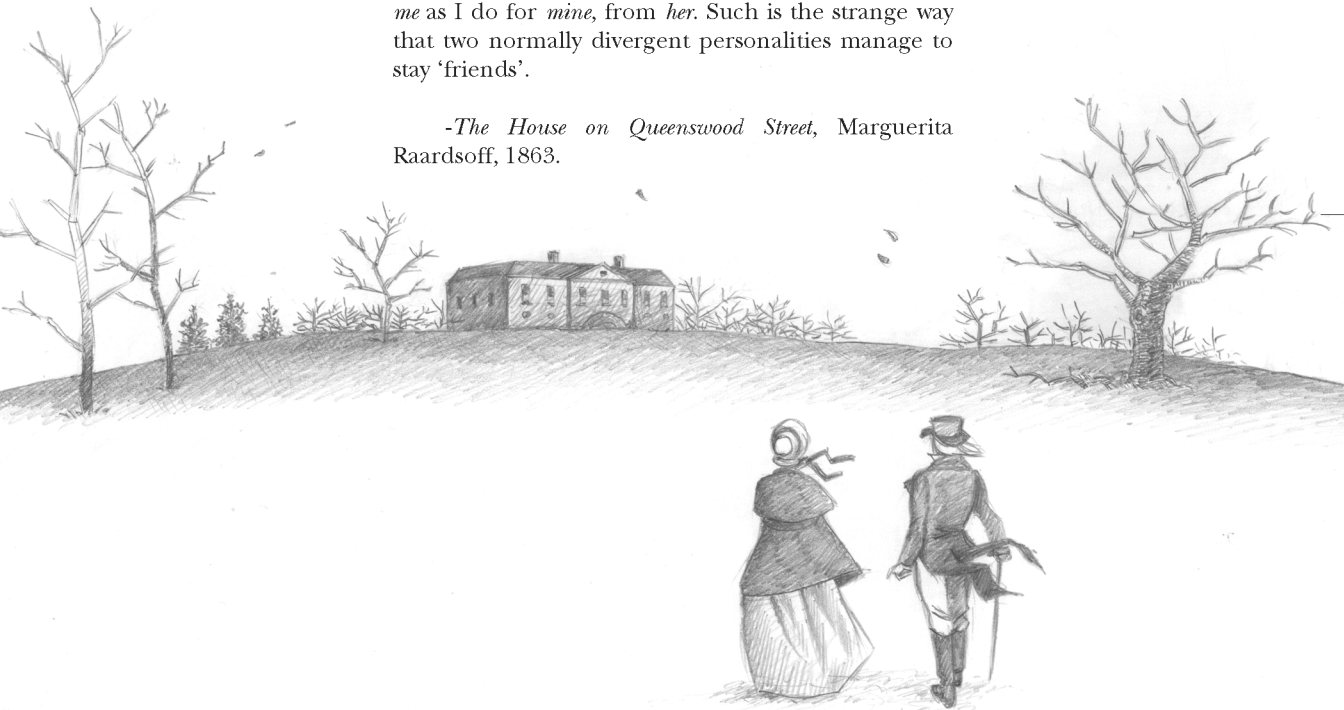


While the Dogger Isle enjoys a relatively mild winter, it is quite normal to find Clynmouth far from bustling at that time of year, and so it is with comparative ease that Mrs. Langley has been able to lease the manor, for the season, at a shockingly low rate. The reduced state of the owner's means has surely also contributed to his being unable to turn down a *handsome* offer from such a noted person as the famous 'Jocasta Wintern'.

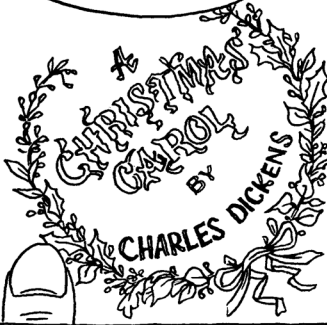
I've come down from Epslow, with the intention of staying out the winter, O'Hare being engaged at Starling Hall for some *indefinite* time and not much else of interest which is keeping me in town. Langley himself has gone to London to take care of some 'business matters', making the atmosphere at Clynmouth Manor that much more pleasant... and I shall be able to spend some time with the enigmatic Miss Lucy Wren, a prospect I find most appealing.

Mrs. Langley and I tolerate one another with an admixture of amusement and ridicule- *on both our parts*. A very literary relationship, I call it, and I'm sure that she draws as much inspiration for *her* work, from *me* as I do for *mine*, from *her*. Such is the strange way that two normally divergent personalities manage to stay 'friends'.

-*The House on Queenswood Street*, Marguerita Raardsoff, 1863.



A GHOST STORY...



HOW DELIGHTFUL!



AND FROM ENGLAND'S MOST POPULAR NOVELIST— I AM TRULY HONORED, SIR.



THE HONOR IS ALL MINE, MA'AM. I AM ONE OF YOUR MOST ARDENT FANS.

BUT WHY SUCH AN INSIPID HOLIDAY?



I FEAR ART MUST SOME-TIMES RALLY TO THE CAUSE OF NECESSITY.



MY MEANS HAVE BEEN STRAINED DUE TO THE COMING ADDITION TO MY FAMILY, SO THE PROCEEDS FROM THIS BOOK WILL BE MOST WELCOME.



MRS. DICKENS AND I WILL BE TAKING SOME TIME AWAY FROM BRITAIN IN THE COMING YEAR.

MR. BRAID HAS PUT ME IN TOUCH WITH A MR. DE LA RUE. WE SHALL STAY WITH HIM IN ITALY. I FIND WE HAVE A MUTUAL INTEREST IN MR. BRAID'S FIELD.

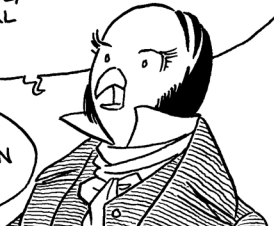


I THOUGHT MESMERISM HAD QUITE GONE OUT OF VOGUE, MR. BRAID.



INDEED, MA'AM. I PREFER THE TERM *NEURO-HYPNOTISM* TO DISTANCE WHAT I DO FROM THOSE MORE DISREPUTABLE PRACTITIONERS. I DO NOT BELIEVE IN ANY SUCH MAGNETIC FLUID AS THEY SAY. I BELIEVE THE EFFECTS CAN BE ACHIEVED AND OBSERVED THROUGH PURELY PSYCHOLOGICAL METHODS.

THE POWER OF SUGGESTION IS KEY.



FASCINATING. I DARE SAY, YOU'VE COME HERE TO MEET OUR POOR COUSIN.



IN MANCHESTER, WE'VE HEARD MANY STORIES ABOUT THE MADONNA OF MAGPIE CRESCENT. I ADMIT, MY INTEREST IN SUCH THINGS MAY HAVE MOTIVATED ME IN SOME SLIGHT WAY TO ACCOMPANY MR. DICKENS ON HIS VISIT HERE TODAY, BUT I SHOULD NOT WISH TO DISTURB THE GIRL.



AS YOU SAY. ANYWAY, SHE IS OUT AT THE MOMENT, WITH OUR FRIEND, COUNTESS RAARDSOFF. THEY MAY BE BACK SOON.



I'VE RECENTLY RECEIVED AN UNUSUAL LETTER FROM DR. PALLADORUS. UNUSUAL IN THAT UP UNTIL NOW, I'VE NEVER RECEIVED ANYTHING FROM HIM AT ALL.

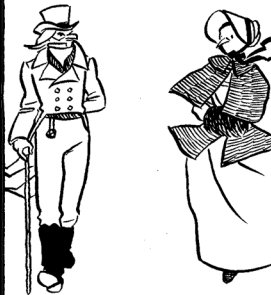
NOTHING GEORGE DOES IS SURPRISING. ONE MAY ALWAYS DIVINE HIS MOTIVE. THERE IS SURELY SOMETHING IN HIS LETTER, NO MATTER HOW ARTFULLY DISGUISED, WHICH BETRAYS HIS INTENTION.



IF THERE IS, I CONFESS I CAN NOT FIND IT. HE TELLS ME HE'S JUST BEEN IN LONDON AND HAS RETURNED TO EPSLOW, WHERE HE PLANS TO VISIT MR. O'HARE AT THE DAFTWOODS'.

THERE. THAT IS IT.

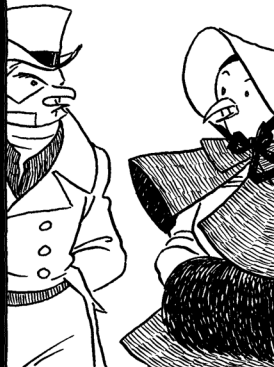
I STILL DON'T UNDERSTAND.



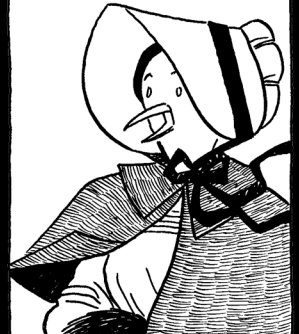
TELL ME ABOUT WHITBY.

WHITBY...

AS YOU KNOW, MY PARENTS DIED WHEN I WAS VERY YOUNG AND I WAS BROUGHT UP IN MY AUNT'S HOUSE. THERE WAS A MAN COME TO WHITBY - A FOREIGNER ... A NOBLEMAN, IT WAS SAID.



PRINCE TOOK UP RESIDENCE IN THE ABBEY AND QUICKLY GATHERED ABOUT HIM A RETINUE OF ADMIRERS. HE HAD A REPUTATION AS A HEALER. OTHERS REGARDED HIM A MOUNTEBANK, A MAGICIAN WHO PREYED ON GULLIBLE AND IMPRESSIONABLE WIDOWS. MY AUNT WAS ONE OF THOSE WHO FELL UNDER HIS CHARM, AND SOON HE HAD FREE ACCESS TO OUR HOUSE.

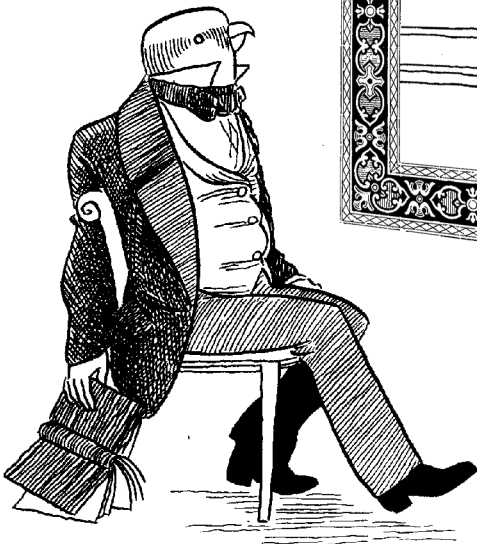
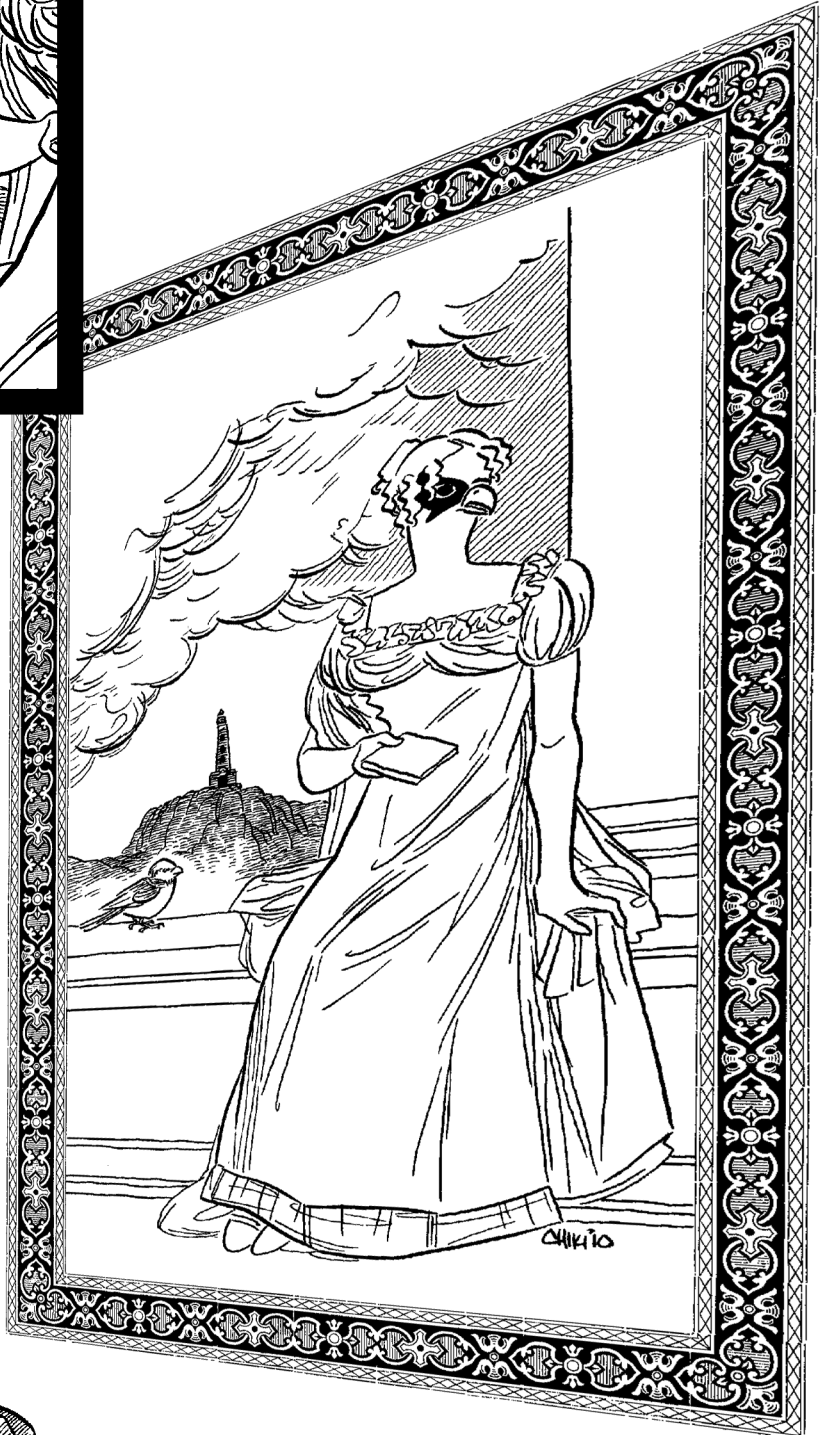


HE TOOK A LIKING TO ME - CLAIMED I WAS A 'SENSITIVE', AS HE CALLED IT, AND DECIDED TO MAKE ME HIS PROTEGE. OF COURSE, MY AUNT ENCOURAGED HIM IN THIS.

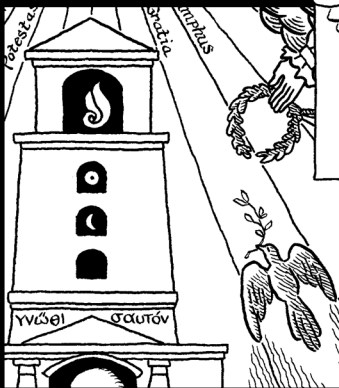
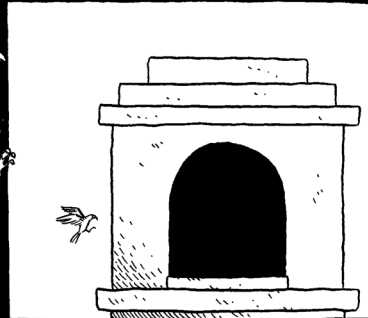
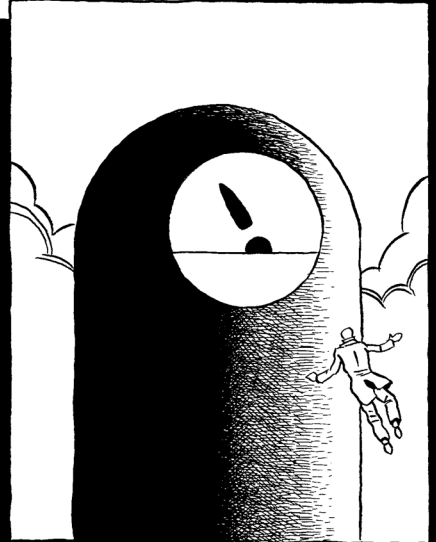
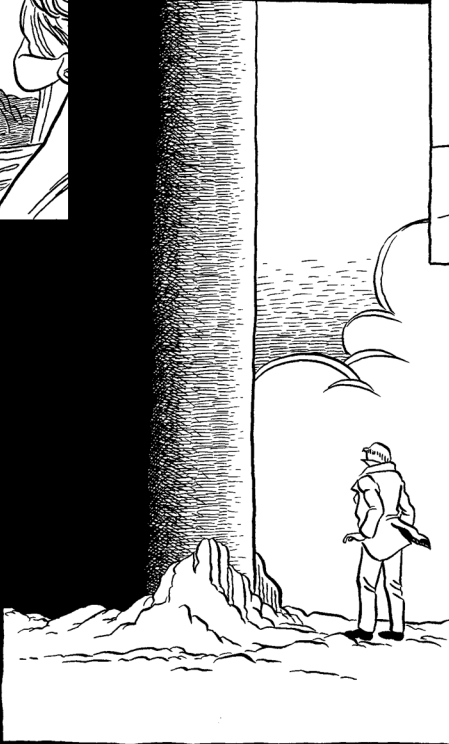
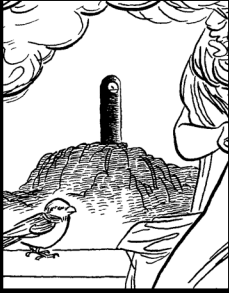
AFTER A TIME, RUMOURS BEGAN TO CIRCULATE THAT ALL WAS NOT AS IT SEEMED IN THE ABBEY. EVENINGS OF HEALING, WHICH INVOLVED THE LAYING ON OF HANDS, WERE SAID TO BE A COVER FOR ACTIVITIES OF A MORE... LASCIVIOUS NATURE.

EVENTUALLY, A VERY REAL SCANDAL BROKE OUT, INVOLVING THE WIVES OF TWO PROMINENT MEN IN TOWN. THE PRINCE FLED TO LONDON AND I, BEING TAINTED BY MY CLOSE ASSOCIATION WITH HIM, WAS SENT AWAY TO LIVE WITH MY COUSIN.





Tower Tower standing tall,
No great wind shall cause
thy fall.
No great shudder of the
Earth shall
'ffect thy stones of Madness
built.



continued...

THE

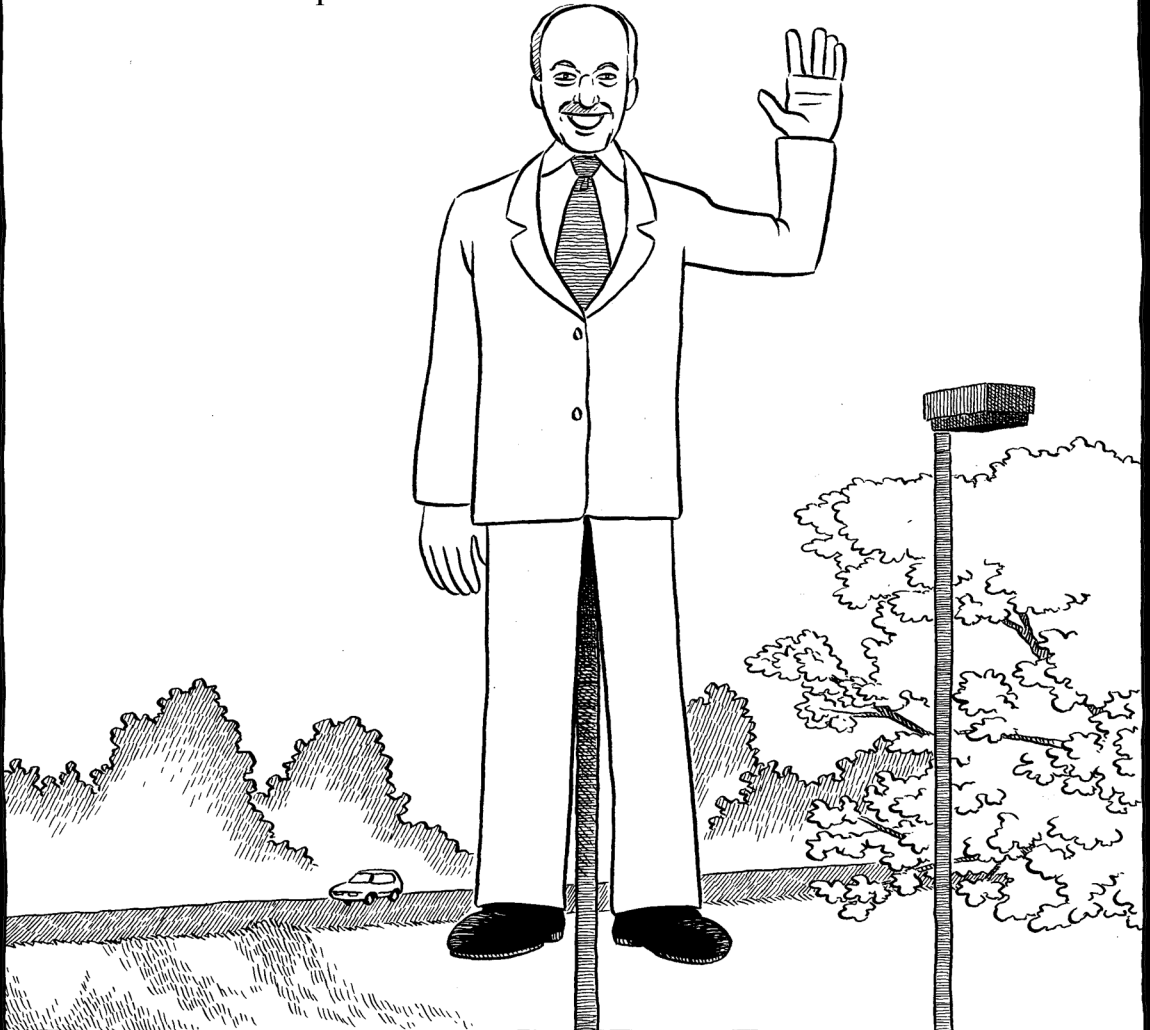
TRANSPARENT

There can be no doubt that there's something going on down there, beneath the layers of dirt and rot. Aside from the romantic ideas of writers such as Verne, Poe and Bulwer-Lytton, to name just a few, the idea is implicit in nearly every religion and mythos. If we are to accept that the Gods are in Heaven and the Demons are underground, and H.T.'s second axiom holds true, then there should be some cosmic balance which binds them like two sides of the same coin. Accepting such a position, is it then so outlandish a thing to say, that the Aethyric and Daemonic Currents are twin siblings... or perhaps even one and the same?

-from **Below Our Feet**, by Fairy Peril, published in *Miss Prue's Black Wrist Cuffs*, issue 7, Fall 1989.

Chapter three:

The Yellow Man



The Transparent

Sunday, June 24, 1990, 6:14 a.m.

The phone rings. I would ignore it even if I was at home, but being able to ignore the phone in someone else's house has its particular satisfaction. Stella growls, rolls and picks it up, mumbling a greeting. I'm surprised at her telephone attentiveness. She's always seemed like someone who would screen.

"...for you," she says with her eyes still closed, pushing the phone in my face.

"Hello?"

"Get a bag packed, we're going on a road trip. I'll be over in a half hour."

"...how did you know I was here?"

"I called your house first and nobody answered. Bring the Fairy if you want. See you in like...twenty minutes."

"Wait... where are we going?"

"Can't tell you. It's a surprise. OK."

click

Walter Syntax's Statement to the Anti-Gravity League, 1966

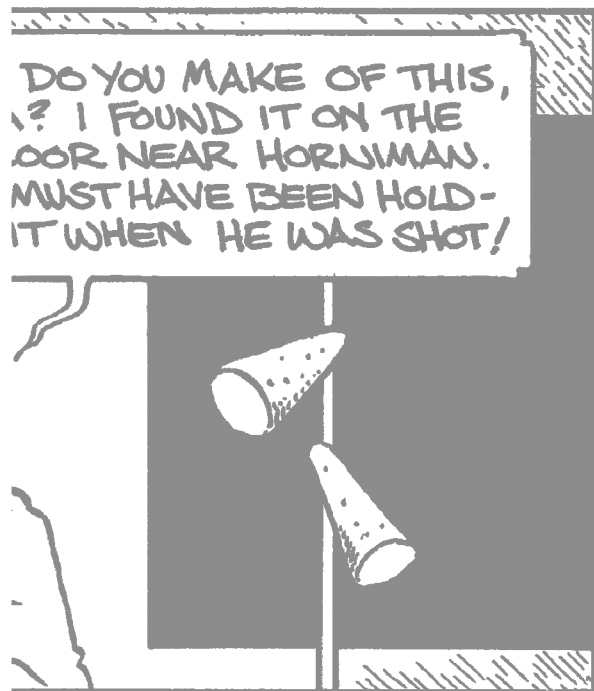
I met Irwin Roth in 1956, when I went to work for Jack Sloane studios. Roth & Sloane had come up through the ranks of the comics biz together, starting out writing science fiction stories for the pulps. Irwin was, by far, the better writer, but Jack was the businessman, and in those days, as now, that's what counted.

Their first big break was *The Magus*. Jack sold the ideas to Happy King Comics and set up his own studio, hiring writers and artists to develop his ideas and paying them peanuts. Irwin ended up working for Jack as one writer among many, creating and developing concepts he'd receive little credit for.

I started as a penciler. Sloane Studios was famous for paying the lowest page rates in the business, but Sloane always had work, and if you were one of the thousands of struggling

hacks, that's what you wanted- work. Even though I was relatively new, in a short time, he had me working on *Magus*, by then, Happy King's major property.

When I started on *Magus*, Roth had been kept off the title for years. The story was that Jack thought he'd become too possessive of the character. He had him working on one of his horror lines, a knock off of *Frankenstein*, some typical horror cliché stuff, all pretty awful. But then, shortly after I started on *Magus*, Roth somehow managed to get himself reassigned to it. Maybe Jack didn't know about it. That was the infamous 'King Felix' run. And that was the thing which led to their break. For a rookie penciller like me though, it was the job of a lifetime.



The Transparent

Sunday, June 24, 1990, 11:30 p.m., Big Dipper Inn, Berwick, PA.

"There was a trail in the woods," says Stella, lying on her back in the dark, staring at the ceiling, "we called the Indian trail. When I was little, the Indian trail was exciting. My friends and I would always turn back at some point, though, never follow it to where it ultimately led. The further on it went, the wilder it became. The trail dipped down a slope and we had to scramble over the rotting hulk of a tree, which had fallen in its path. The houses on the street behind us disappeared as we ventured further into the Wild. Even the echoing clatter of a streetcar, away somewhere on the other side of the ravine, seemed less like the sound of civilization, and more like the shuddering of some untamed, chthonic force. As I got older, and bigger, I took the path by myself and eventually there was a day when I followed it to the end. That was the day the Indian trail lost the magic and ceased to be the Indian trail. Instead of leading to an underground tunnel, or to a lake with a waterfall, or to a clearing with an elf circle, it led to the back of someone's house, someone's stupid, totally unremarkable house, looking like a million others. And the trail was now simply a path through a bit of suburban woods and the slope looked down not upon an enchanted ravine, but a hollow with streetcar tracks, and on the other side, more cookie-cutter houses. But even though the trail had lost its power, the magic was still there. It was an elusive magic, glimpsed only in the peripheral vision, like the peculiar property of wooden chess pieces and the sacred geometry of the chessboard; the little diagrams of chess problems, printed on rough newsprint and smelling of ink, like sigils in a grimoire, glimpsed in the moonlight, in the silence of night;

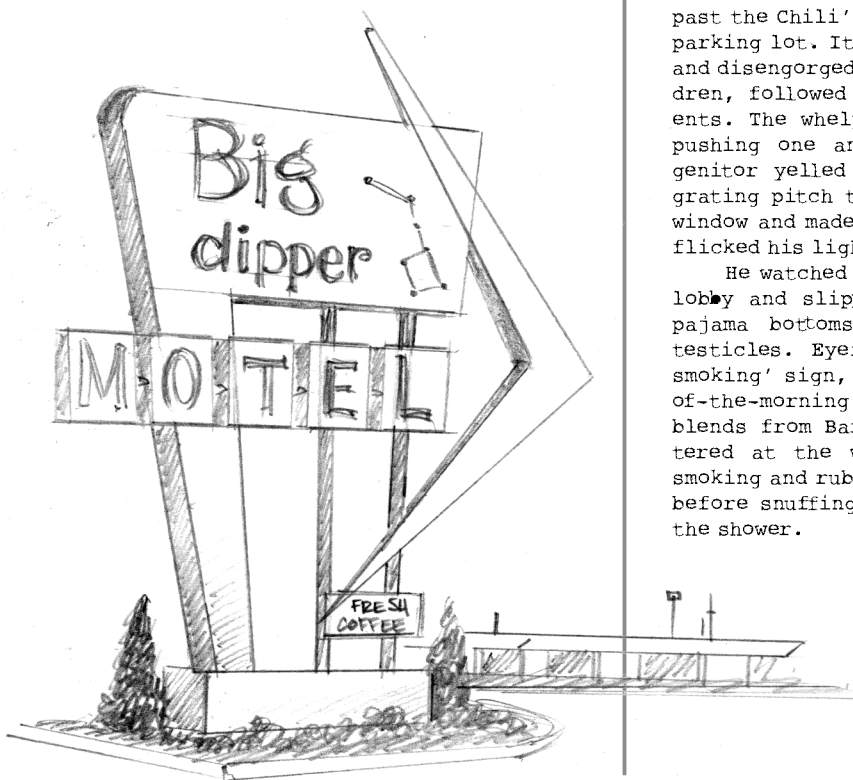
the line of disused mutoscopes at the back of the penny arcade, with their ornately carved casings, Belle Epoque stylings and weather-browned rolls of flip-pictures; yellowing circus posters, crystal balls, spirit cabinets and haunting names like Houdin, Thurston, Kellar and Blackstone; the dyed wooden peices and cracked playing board of the Parchesi game in my grandmother's attic, and her stacks of clothe-bound books smelling of damp and ancient paper, with colored plates of brownies and African leopards and Greek actors; the trump images of playing cards, the airbrushed facades of fairground attractions; photographs of mediums producing ectoplasm- all those things have the magic, an endless series of avatars, celestial messengers, memory theaters, guiding our souls, like the psychopomp, into the silent caverns of the dead."

From the *John Tern Manuscript*, fourth rewrite.

P2, awoke in the processed chill of his air-conditioned hotel suite. Throwing back the rumpled, burnt sienna sheets, he stretched the morning stiffness from his muscles and padded over to the window to peer through the blinds. The haze of Florida humidity hung obscenely on the air like a badly formed metaphor. He hated these damp, hot places. The thought so bothered him that he instinctively reached for a cigarette.

A Toyota Highlander drove on up the lane that snaked through the commercial park, past the Chili's next door and into the hotel parking lot. It stopped at the entrance port and disengorged four noisy, overweight children, followed by their ham-faced antecedents. The whelps ran about, screaming and pushing one another while their maternal genitor yelled at them ineffectually in a grating pitch that pierced the glass of the window and made P2 wrinkle up his nose as he flicked his lighter.

He watched her corral her brood into the lobby and slipped his right hand into his pajama bottoms to languidly scratch his testicles. Eyeing the 'thank you for not smoking' sign, he sucked in a hearty first-of-the-morning drag off one of his custom blends from Baron's of Piccadilly. He loitered at the window a few moments more, smoking and rubbing his balls in half a mind, before snuffing out his fag and heading for the shower.



The Transparent

Stepping from the lift and into the lobby of the Hôtel d'Esplanade in Ft. Myers, P2 looked first right and then left, the starched collar of his fawn-colored safari-style leisure jacket chafing his razor burn. Following the smell of scrambled eggs, he spotted the breakfast buffet and with a spin of his heel, sauntered in. His white Bucks treaded noiselessly upon the immaculately vacuumed carpet while the poly/cotton blend of his trousers rustled like dry leaves in an autumn breeze. He felt fresh and dry, just as he preferred. Time for some breakfast... and a cigarette.

P2 studied the selection at the buffet and after careful deliberation over the various cereals in miniature boxes, he decided on the corn flakes, along with a glass of chilled, fresh-squeezed orange juice and a cup of coffee- Half & Half, no sugar. He poured 2% milk from a half pint carton over his corn flakes and made a precursory scan of the room, furtively measuring up the other guests. There was an ancient fossil seated nearby in a blue blazer, yachting cap and silk ascot sipping a cup of Sanka beneath a white David Nivenesque mustache. His small eyes, set in a leathered and creased face, like two pits in a brown, toasted almond, casually perused a copy of *Hollywood Reporter*. An anorexic, blonde young thing (probably his niece) sat next to him picking through a fruit cup. At another table, two middle-aged and apple-shaped women in stretch pants and terry cloth, clucked like hens while one of them checked her lipstick in a mirror, baring her teeth to scan for red strokes gone astray from their labial canvas. Between them, a rodent of a boy, about fifteen, sat sullen and silent, his eyes glued on *Good Morning America*, radiating mutely from the television in the corner of the room. Two of the children from the parking lot chased each other through the lobby, caterwauling, while their pater studied tourist brochures near the check in counter, with a pinched expression upon his sweat-moistened phiz, the point of a toothpick extending from the corner of his oral fissure.

P2's contact hadn't yet shown up. He finished his corn flakes and carried his coffee out on to the adjoining verandah to light another of his little brown cigarettes with the distinctive gold band. Dragging on the thick heady smoke, he glanced at the headlines of an abandoned newspaper, examined his cuticles and then watched a couple of attractive, young señoritas walking up to their jobs at the Chili's, their shapely rounded bottoms pleasingly discernible through the skirts of their waitress uniforms. P2 rubbed his chin, a grin forming on his mouth, as he began to enjoy his view of the local wildlife.

This job may not be so bad after all, he mused.

1972, Mt. Lebanon, PA.

I buy my first issue of *Grand Guignol*, at the Village Tobacco & News. My grandfather takes me there on Saturdays. He drops me off at the comics and heads back to look at the *Penthouse* and *Hustlers*. He doesn't know that I know what he's looking at... or maybe he does. Over time, There seems to develop an unspoken understanding. Anyway, he goes to look at his stuff and I go to look at mine.

The cover isn't especially titillating, unlike the true crime and detective magazines nearby, but it's enough to pique the interest of a twelve year old. Just visible, in the shadows of a rooftop, peering out over the luminous grid of a nighttime metropolis, is a curvaceous form clad in a tight-fitting leather jumpsuit- a la Emma Peel. She holds a gun in one hand and a smoking cigarette in the other. A giant question mark frames the teaser: *Who is Felicity Rex?* The stories inside are all exceptionally dark and lurid, full of violence, horror and, what I later learn to be fetish eroticism.

I hand the magazine to my grandfather when he comes back to collect me, counting on the fact that he won't be interested enough in comics to actually have a peek inside. He grabs a pack of chewing tobacco (a habit he'd picked up after giving up cigarettes, in order to set a good example for his grandkids) pays for our things, and hands me back my treasure. A rush of excitement and a poke of guilt quickly follow.

Grand Guignol was published by a magazine company called Harlequinade. After the EC debacle had forced the comics industry into self-censorship, Harlequinade avoided the comics code authority by publishing their comics in a larger format, claiming that they weren't actually comics, but magazines, aimed at an older audience. And indeed they were, with titles such as *The Sins of Lady Frankenstein*, *Horror & Madness* and *Galaxy de Sade*, all with covers painted by some of the leading brushes of fantasy art and stories by many of the veterans of the hard-boiled years... in many ways, these comics magazines were a throwback to the pulps of the 30's.

In later years, as my obsession with Irwin Roth grew, I learned that that issue was a famous one, not only for being the first appearance in Harlequinade of Felicity Rex, but also because it was Roth's first contribution to the title. Roth had broken with Jack Sloane and left Sloane studios in the sixties over "creative differences". Industry scholars know that this was chiefly to do with the *Magus* property. Officially, Sloane had created *Magus*, along with all the other Sloane properties, but in reality, Roth and Sloane created *Magus* together. Probably, it was mostly Roth's creation, but Sloane owned it and could dictate how the series ran.

The Transparent

Roth wanted *the Magus* to be morally ambiguous and he didn't especially like the pre-requisite superhero costume. Sloane, always mindful of his market, over-ruled Roth's ideas and forced him to write stories, which Roth thought were somewhat puerile and lacking in depth.

After Roth walked out on Sloane, he was in a bad place, emotionally, mentally and financially. He tried creating a character similar to *Magus* for one of Sloane's rivals, but Sloane sued them for copyright infringement. After that, of course, was his disappearance and re-appearance in the desert and then his long sojourn on the west coast.

And then, in '72, Roth was back in comics with Harlequinade, and their new line of horror magazines. Felicity Rex was Roth's attempt to revive his original idea for *the Magus*. Felicity was the perfect antihero. Born into colonial West Indian upper-class, she was genteel. Forced to cope with devastating trauma at an early age and survive by her wits, cunning, skill and charm, she was removed from sentiment and morality. She was deadly, a gun for hire, an avenging angel of chaos. She had a fine coterie of nemeses and colleagues, foremost of which was her fellow mercenary, Penny Dreadful. Their love-hate rivalry, sometimes lapsing into murderous conflict was the stuff of pre-pubescent fantasy. Of course I became addicted to the series, and my obsession with Roth and his work began.

Monday, June 25, 1990. Zanoni Diner, Berwick, PA.

We finish our breakfast, sip our coffee and gaze at the buildings along the commercial strip across the street.

Nicky: Look... see that? Kingfisher Automotive... my family used to own that.

Eoghan: But your name's Kinfisher.

Nicky: We lost the 'g' in the war.

Eoghan: So how long is this trip? You didn't say whether we'd be staying more than one night. I only had time to pack one change of clothes.

Nicky: We're just a few hours away from our destination.

Eoghan: Are you gonna tell us now where we're heading?

Nicky: Not yet.

Stella: Dig the crazy sign in front of that place! (pointing to the yellow man) What do you think is in there?

Eoghan: I don't think it's open. Looks like it's abandoned.

Nicky: A yellow man... what does a yellow man mean?

Stella: Well... in China, yellow was the color of royalty. Only the emperor was allowed to wear it. And in the nineteenth century, yellow represented decadence and mental illness... *The Yellow Wallpaper*, *The King in Yellow*, *The Yellow Book*...

Nicky: I don't know... he looks pretty happy.

Eoghan: There's no sign or anything on the building.

Nicky: I bet it was an auto parts store... or a car wash.

Stella: A car wash? Where's the car wash? The building looks more like it was some kind of office.

Nicky: Maybe car insurance.

Stella: Why are you so obsessed with the car idea.

Nicky: I dunno... something about yellow... and cars...

Our waitress comes by.

Waitress: Anything else I can get you folks, or would you like your check?

Eoghan: We'll take the check, thanks. Um... would you happen to know what used to be in that building across the street?

Waitress: Well, it's been a long time since anything was there. I think it used to be something weird, like the Bigfoot Appreciation Society, or something like that...

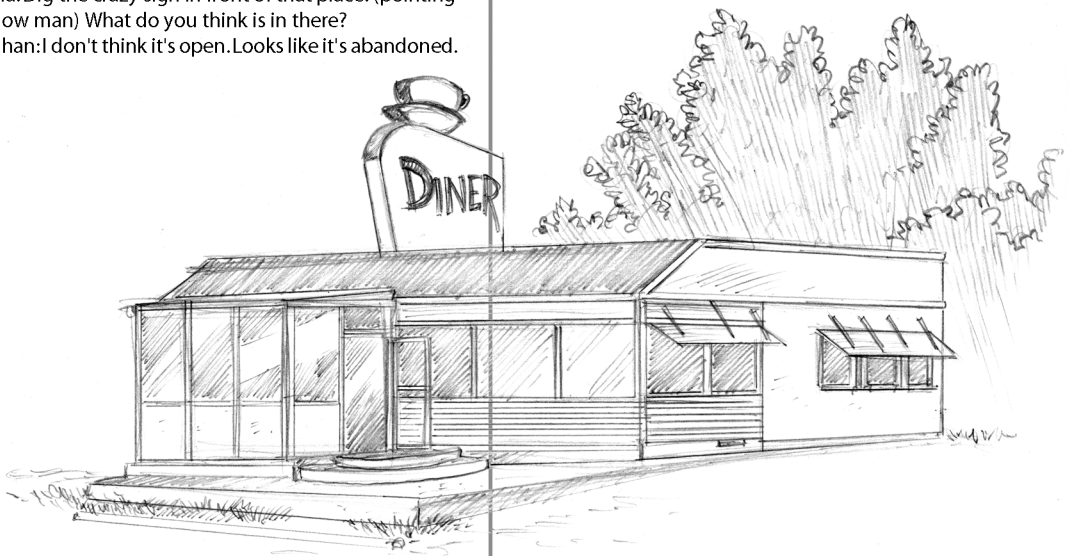
Stella: Bigfoot? I thought that was in California.

Waitress: Oh no. We get lots of Bigfoots out here. 'Specially further out towards the state park.

Nicky: We're heading that way. Maybe we'll see a few.

Waitress: I don't know. They tend to keep to themselves. I'll take that whenever you're ready.

"I'll have the scrambled eggs, please, toast and some green tea."



The Transparent

The voice was unmistakably female, sultry and Caucasian.

Hello... P2 turned, making a sucking noise through his teeth.

She carried her paper plate and plastic fork to her table with haughty confidence walking as though she knew all around her were compelled by her presence and she cared not a pin. The artifact in the yachting cap followed her trail cannily with an arched eyebrow while his niece scowled. The two round women lowered their voices, and the one whispered something catty while the other snorted and wrinkled her chin. The lad looked nervous and wiped the perspiration from the pubescent fuzz of his upper lip.

As P2 watched her, his unflicked cigarette ash grew precariously long from the tip of his fag. The first thing he noticed was her firm, full breasts. He studied these with the eye of a connoisseur measuring up a pair of fine ripe grapefruits. Her raven black hair was pulled back to reveal a finely formed face, adorned with soulful doe eyes and full red lips. And he noticed her firm, full breasts.

Knowing that although he must at some point approach her, he couldn't do it there, so he checked his watch. He decided that while as a rule he did not drink before ten a.m., he was in retirement-community country, and so he strode slowly towards the bar, making sure on the way that he caught her eye. He sidled up and ordered his regular.

"Bloody White Russian, please."

The barman looked at him in that dry way, so mastered by those of his trade.

"What the hell is that?"

"One part vodka, one part Kahlúa, two parts whole milk, with two maraschino cherries and a shot of maraschino juice... on the rocks."

"You want a little paper parasol with that?"

"You better believe it," said P2 with a wink.

He slapped a twenty down on the bar, sipped his cocktail and went over in his mind several of the details of his assignment while the opening theme from *The Price Is Right* blared from the bar TV. Mr. Roak would be one of the guests in the hotel. His contact was there to identify the man. It was a simple job then really: wait for him to make the transaction and then 'neutralize' him, appropriate the item and wait for extraction. Shouldn't take more than a day, assuming Roak's deal went through on schedule.

As P2 watched an overly excited contestant give the big wheel a spin, his peripheral vision caught someone approaching. She strutted in, took her place at the bar several seats down and ordered a mimosa. He made a slurping sound as he sucked the dregs of his cocktail from the bottom of his glass with the little stirring straw, then set the glass on the bar and moved near to where she was sitting.

"I couldn't help noticing your accent... Uzbeki, isn't it?"

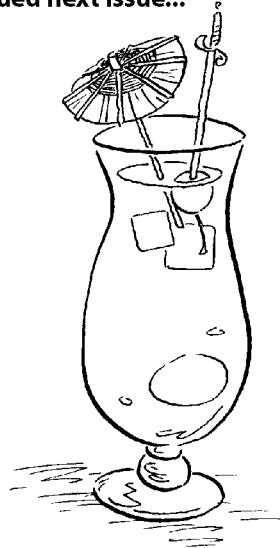
Her smile both stirred his groin and tightened his gut.

"Manly Hardwood," he said, extending his fin.

"How do you do, Mr. Hardwood," she carefully pronounced her words.

"My name is Penny Dreadful."

Continued next issue...



About the author:

Sean Chiki is a cartoonist and illustrator. He lives in San Francisco with his wife, three cats and many, many books.

For more information-
www.dadayama.com
sean.chiki@gmail.com

Back issues of *Wunderhammer* are available for order from www.aukbrandcomics.com



LEY BARRETT
PRESIDENT



GEORGE W. FRY
SECRETARY



KENNETH ABBOTT



RG
PAUL MONTAGUE



HUBERT PINSHAW



MARION GREER



FRANKLIN McINNES



OND PALMER



BERNHARD STUPP



HUGO MANNING



DR. D.V. ERIKSON



REGINALD WALSCH



JACK SLOANE



IRWIN ROTH



CHAS. RADOMSKY



IC ULLOM



FRED FISCHER



STANLEY GILMORE



JON L. DePOE

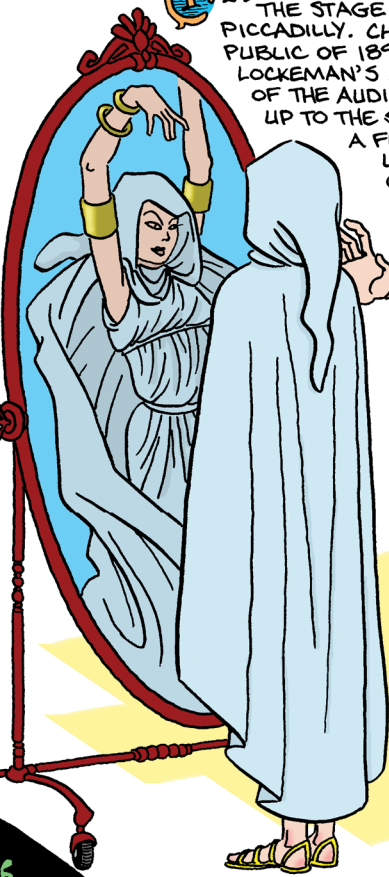
Dagostino Studios

Lockeman's Mirror

10 CHIKI

1 A STARTLING NEW SPECTACLE GRACED THE STAGE OF LONDON'S EGYPTIAN HALL IN PICCADILLY. CHARLES MORRITT UNVEILED FOR THE PUBLIC OF 1891, HIS LATEST ILLUSION-LOCKEMAN'S MIRROR! MEMBERS OF THE AUDIENCE WERE INVITED UP TO THE STAGE TO EXAMINE A FULL-LENGTH LOOKING GLASS...

2 AN ASSISTANT WAS LED OUT- USUALLY A YOUNG WOMAN IN A GHOSTLY WHITE SHROUD- TO STAND BEFORE THE MIRROR, AND WAS PUT INTO A HYPNOTIC TRANCE. MORRITT ANNOUNCED HE WOULD THEN COMMAND THE GIRL'S ASTRAL SPIRIT, OR SUBTLE BODY, TO OBEY HIS INSTRUCTIONS. TO THE ASTONISHMENT OF THE AUDIENCE, THE GIRL'S REFLECTION PROCEEDED TO CAVORT ABOUT AND ASSUME VARIOUS POSES, WHILE THE GIRL HERSELF REMAINED PERFECTLY STILL, SEEMINGLY ASLEEP.



3 LIKE THOSE OF ALL GRAND ILLUSIONS, THE SECRET BEHIND LOCKEMAN'S MIRROR WAS DECEPTIVELY SIMPLE, AND ONE MAY LEARN IT BY READING DANIEL DEVANT'S *MAGIC WITHOUT TEARS*, (1909, G. ROUTLEDGE PUBLN.)

bloody Mary, bloody Mary, bloody Mary...

... MIRRORS AND COPULATION ARE ABOMINABLE, SINCE THEY BOTH MULTIPLY THE NUMBERS OF MEN.



TLÖN, UQBAR, ORBIS TERTIUS, JORGE LUIS BORGES



THE TITLE OF THE ILLUSION REFERRED TO THE 16TH CENTURY CABALIST, PINDAR LOCKEMAN, WHOSE OWN MIRROR APPEARED TO BE EITHER A BLACKENED DISH OR A POLISHED STONE, USED FOR SCRYING, THE GEOTIC ART OF SUMMONING SPIRITS, A PRACTICE WHICH SURVIVES TO THE PRESENT.

PINDAR LOCKEMAN

WHAT MAKES THE MIRROR PARTICULARLY INTRIGUING IS NOT SO MUCH THE TRUTH OF ITS REFLECTION, BUT ITS FICTION. AND PERHAPS THE MOST TERRIFYING THING IS THAT IT ALLOWS US TO SEE WHAT IS NORMALLY HIDDEN - THE WORLD WHICH LIES BEHIND OUR BACKS- BUT LIMITED TO WITHIN ITS FRAME.

\$5.00
 ISBN 978-1-4507-3603-9
 50500 >

 9 781450 736039