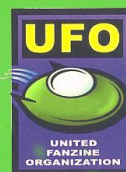


No. 53

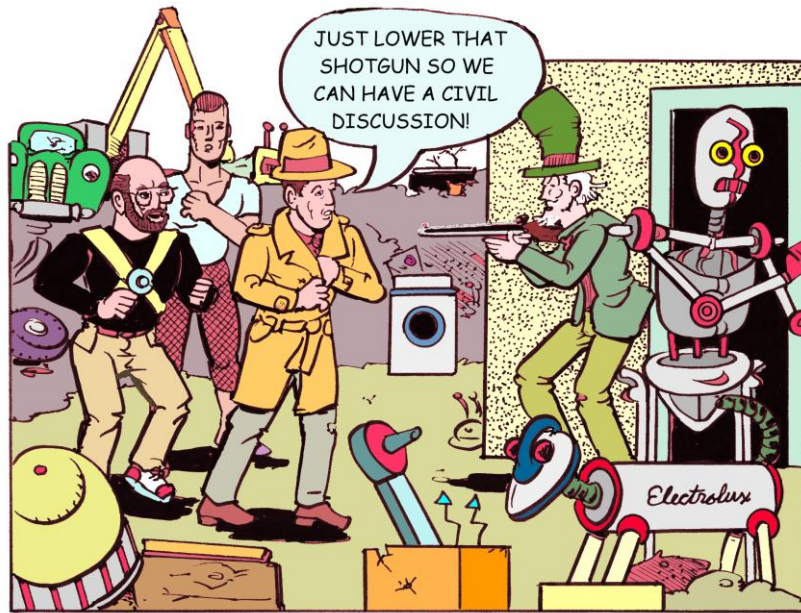
*Tales of*

\$3.00

# *Fantasy*



In all the years that Joe Carbone has lived in the city of Brookston he has never had the occasion to run into Madame Boogala. Well, it didn't seem likely that their paths would ever cross. After all, he's a straight-laced engineer/scientist type employed by the Brookston Scientific Institute and she's – well – she runs a gypsy tea room where she dispenses advice and potions and knows a thing or two about all the supernatural happenings around the city!



It seems fate has finally brought them together, when Joe is unceremoniously deposited in front of Madame Boogala's tearoom. He's invented a top-secret device for the military – an "image dilator" that renders objects invisible. He's experimented on a mechanical man with the dangerous side effect of increasing its size many times.

Thus begins the strange journey of "The Invisible Giant!"

Brookston seems to attract all kinds of strange characters, even aliens intent on taking over the world! That's the case for "Klak-torr, the Conqueror!" Mike Tuz and I have teamed up to create this tale. We hope you enjoy our effort!

Other features this issue include an essay on the 1960s comic Mark Merlin, DC's supernatural hero from the pages of House of Mystery. This piece originally appeared in Larry Blake's Kevin Cool Comics.

You'll also find the UFO checklist and Mails of Fantasy containing the usual insightful comments from our readers. And Space Cat tries his hand at modern art when he visits "Planet Maars." And on the back cover Jesse Stuart and his robot companion Dacto meet up with some strange creatures on one of the many worlds they visit.

That's it for this issue. Hope you like it. Thanks for reading.

**Tales of Fantasy** #53 is published by Larry Johnson who resides at 31 Greenbrook Rd., Hyde Park, MA 02136. E-mail: [LewBrown75@yahoo.com](mailto:LewBrown75@yahoo.com) Website: [LarryJohnsonartist.com](http://LarryJohnsonartist.com) \$3.00 ppd. Subscriptions: four issues for \$11.00. If any fictional character in this publication resembles anyone living or dead it may possibly be an alien dressed up in earthman's clothing! All contents ©2011 Larry Johnson. Completion date: March 2011 (PDF version May 2013)





# Madame Boogala

# MADAME BOOGALA

ONE EVENING IN THE  
RUNDOWN SECTION OF  
BROOKSTON, THE RELATIVE  
PEACE AND CALM IS  
SHATTERED WHEN ...

# THOOM!

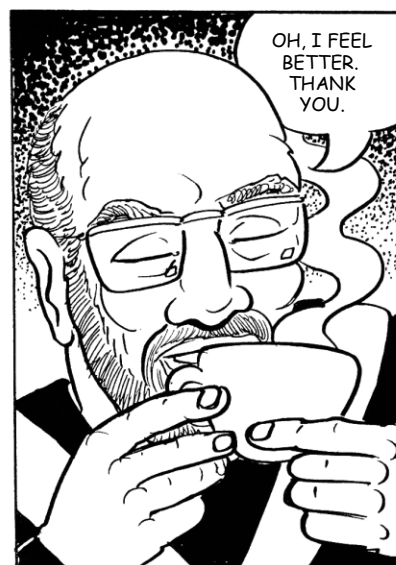
# "The Invisible Giant"

© 2011 Larry Johnson

AND INSIDE THE  
NEARBY TEAROOM ...





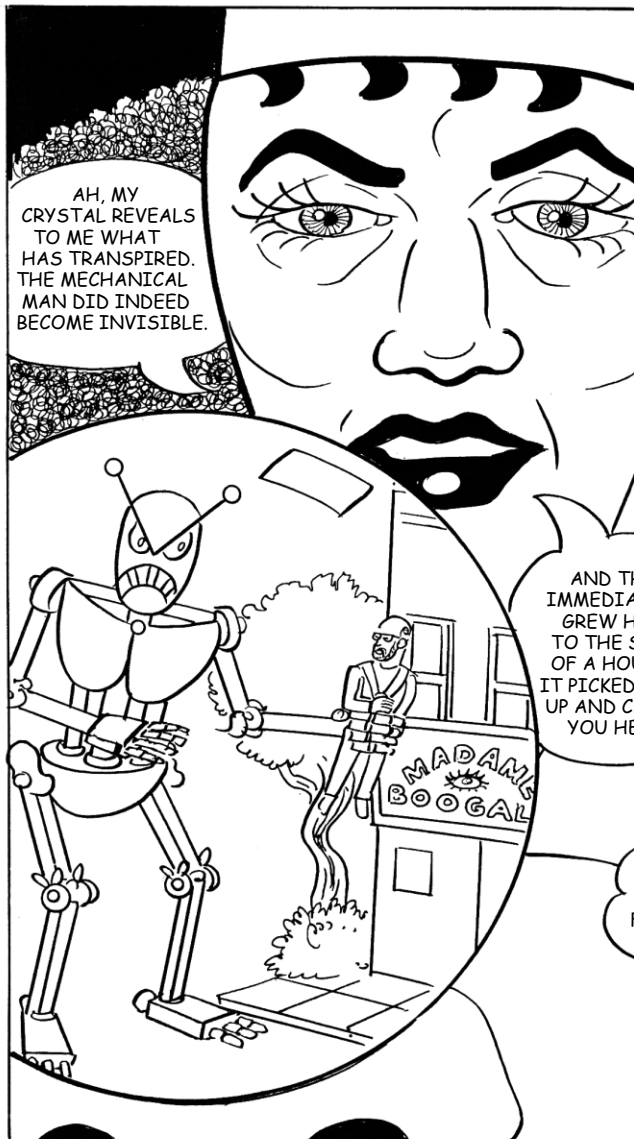
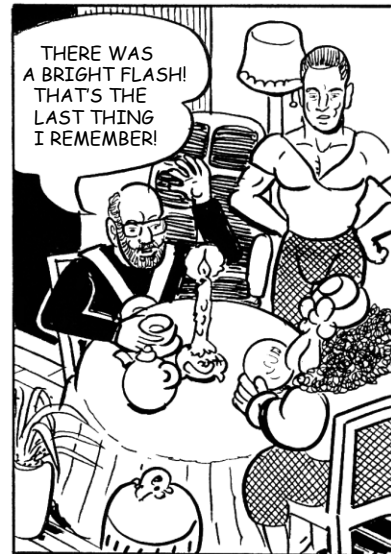
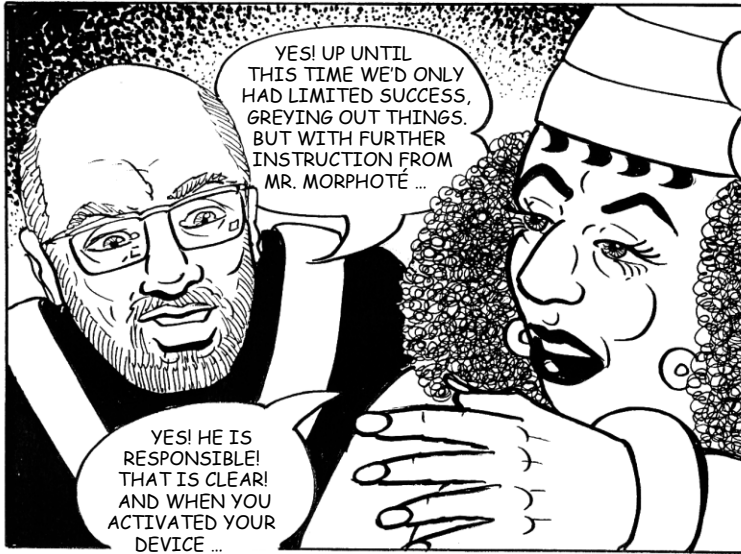


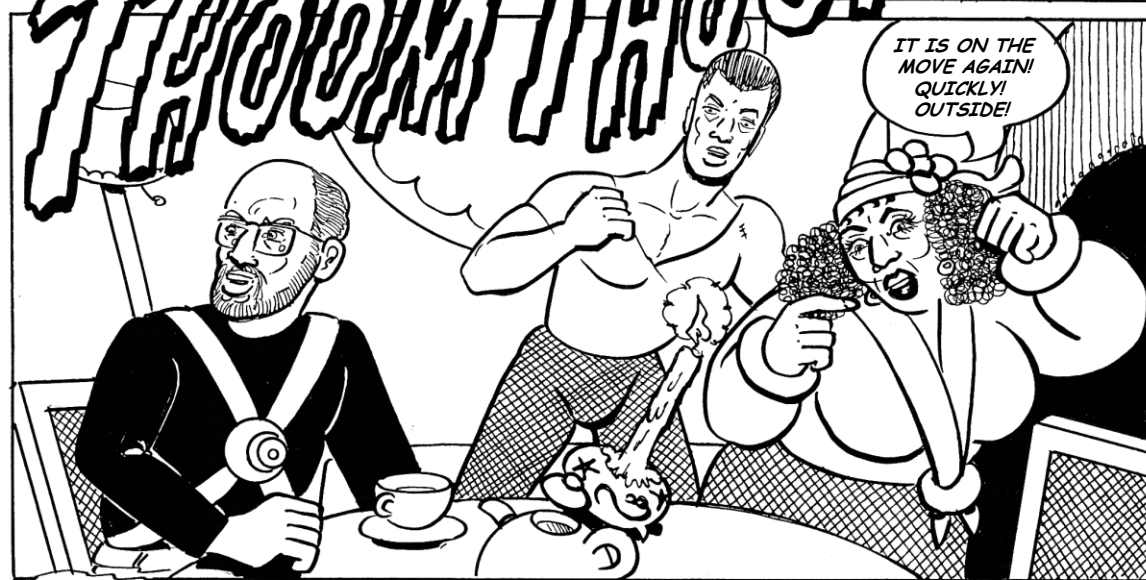
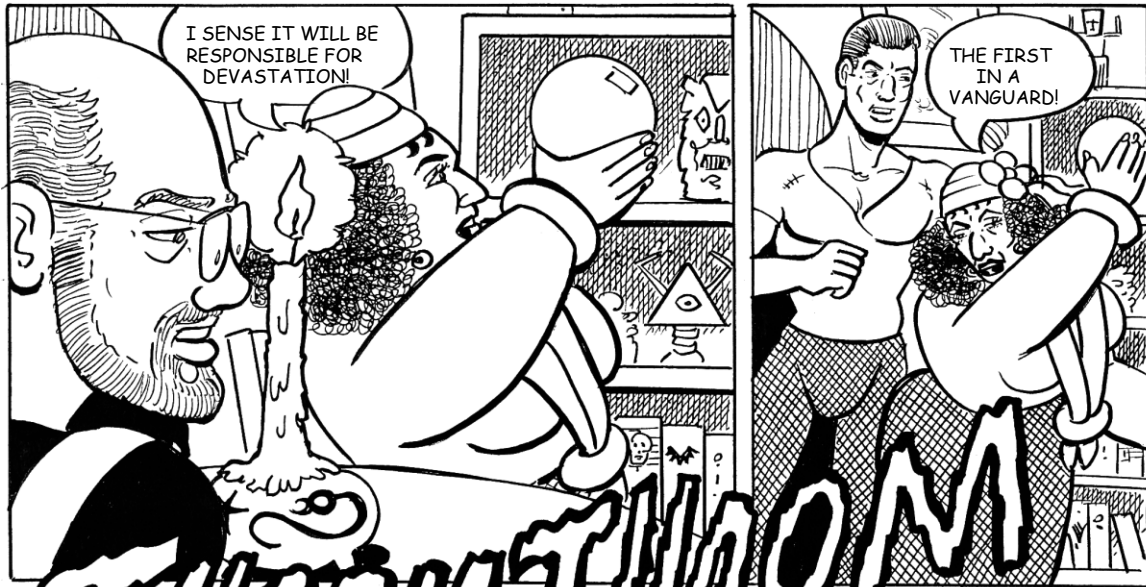




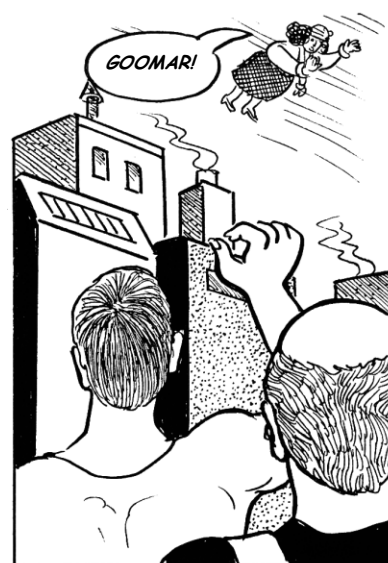


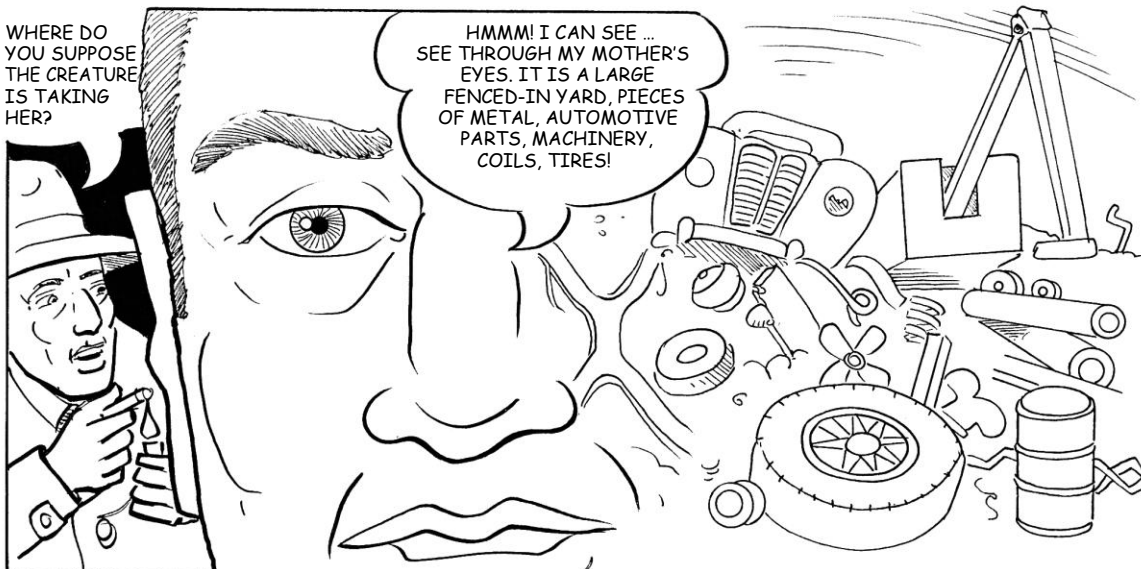












SHORTLY ...







I DON'T COTTON TO NO TRESSPASSERS ON MY PROPERTY AFTER HOURS!

WHOA, OLD MAN! I'M DETECTIVE KOLOWSKI, BROOKSTON POLICE!

THE POLICE?!! TARNATION!! WHO ARE THESE OTHER TWO JASPERS?



FRIENDS OF MINE! LOOK! I'M ON AN INVESTIGATION. I ASSUME YOU ARE ERNIE MORRIS!

WHAT'S IT TO YOU?

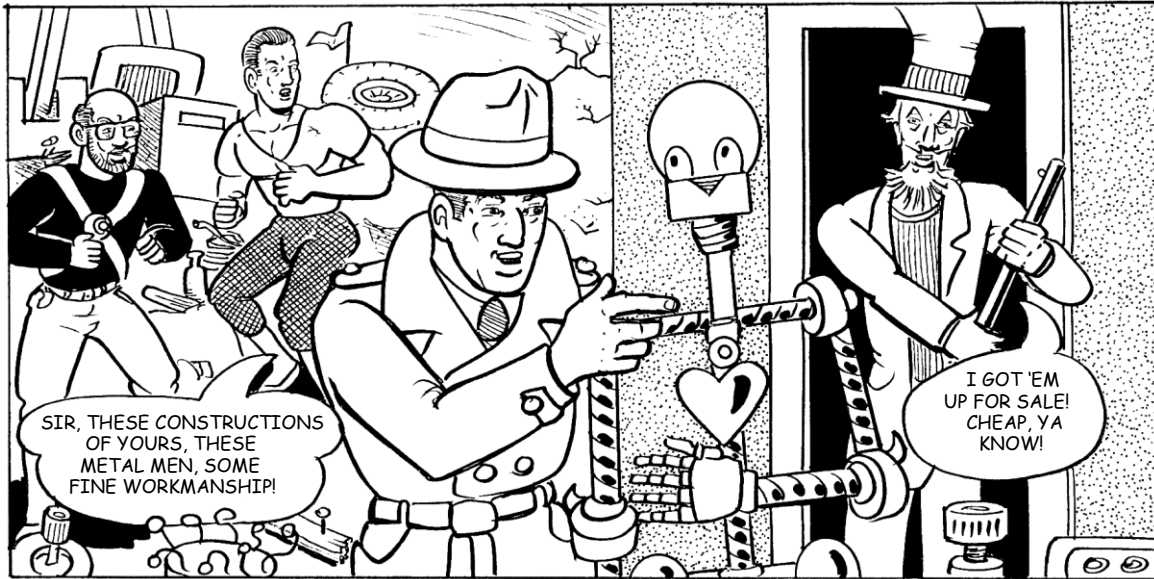


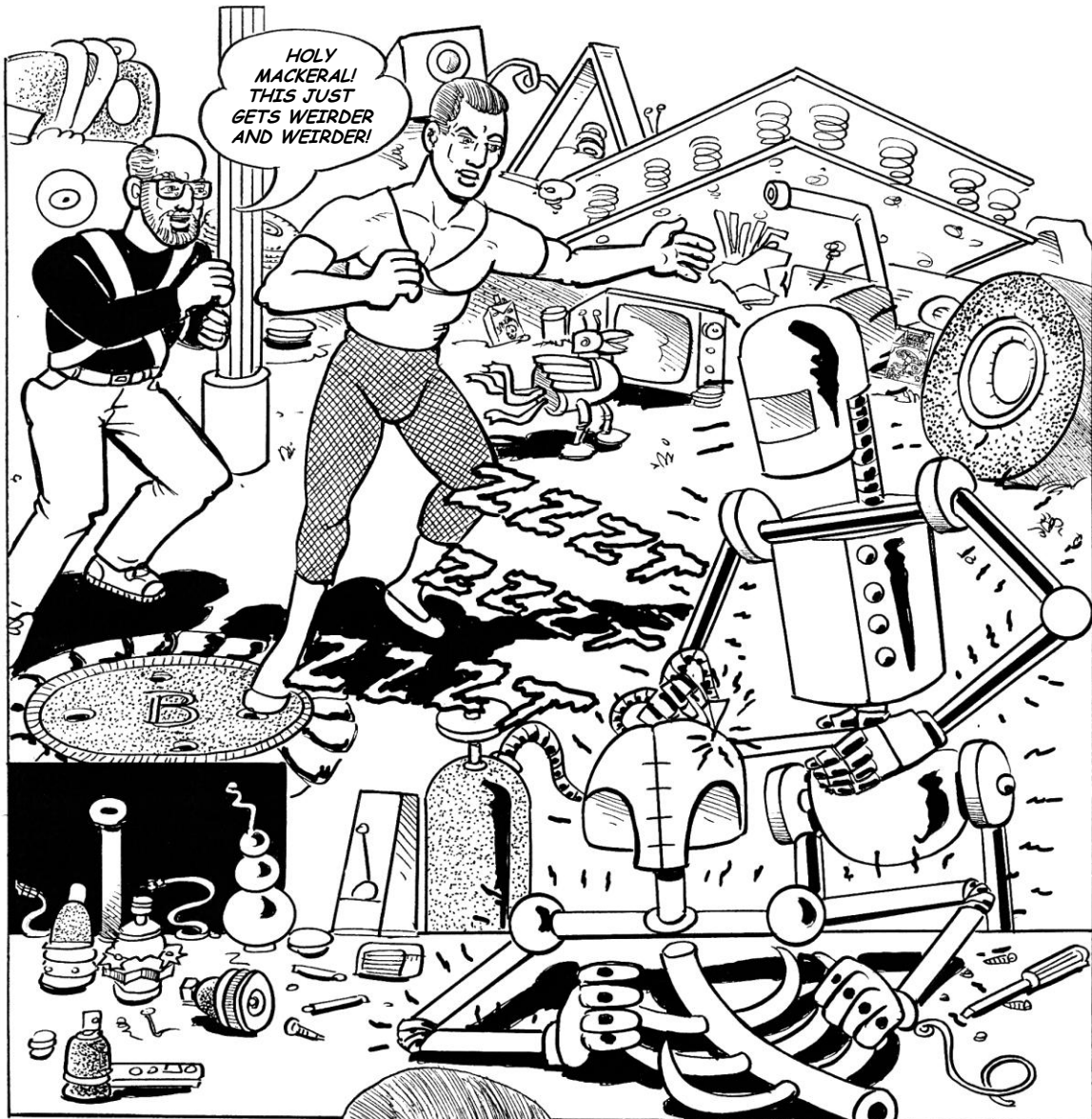
JUST LOWER THAT SHOTGUN SO WE CAN HAVE A CIVIL DISCUSSION!



DETECTIVE! MY MOTHER!

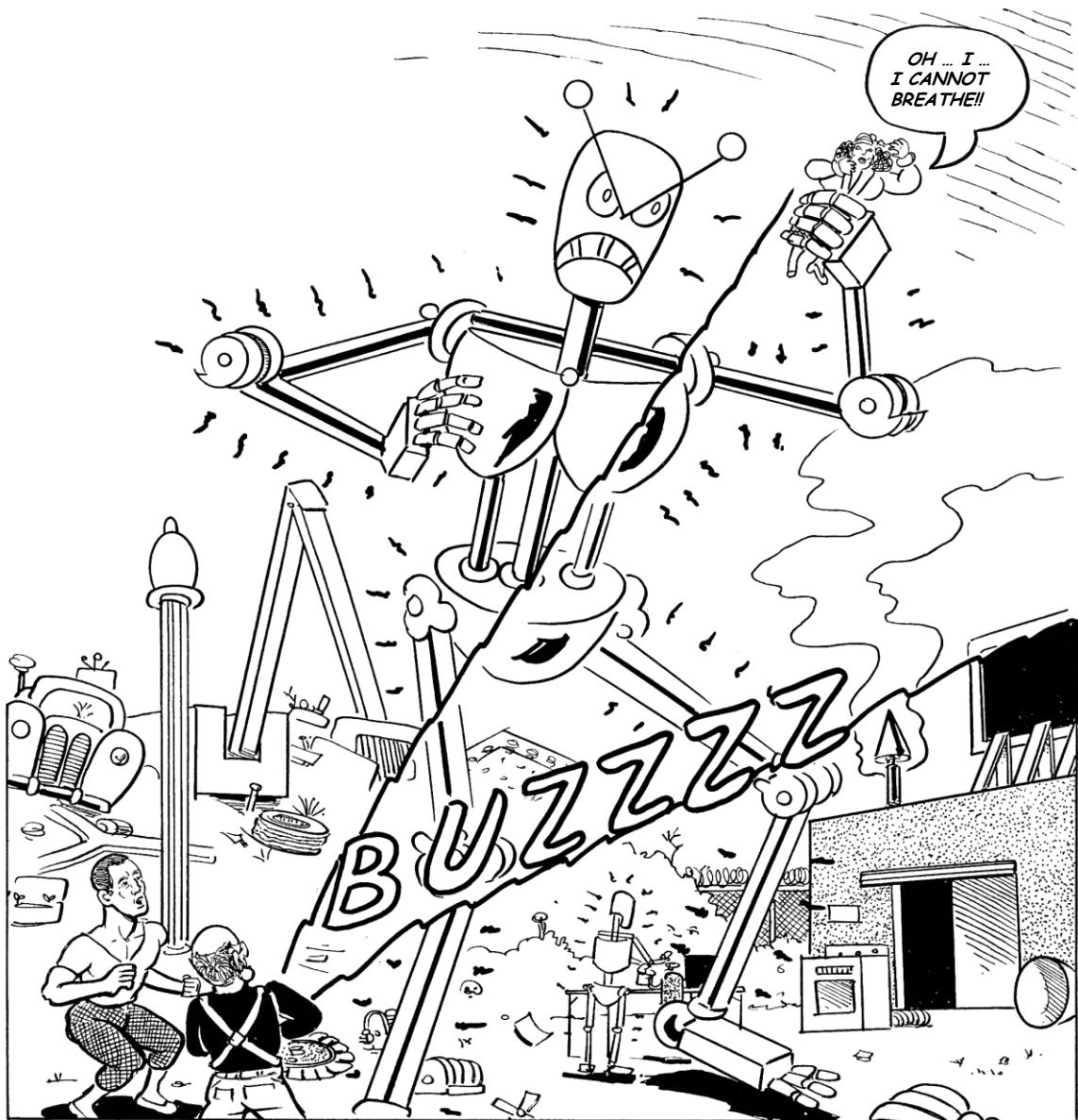
DON'T WORRY, GOOMAR. LET ME HAVE A FEW WORDS WITH HIM.

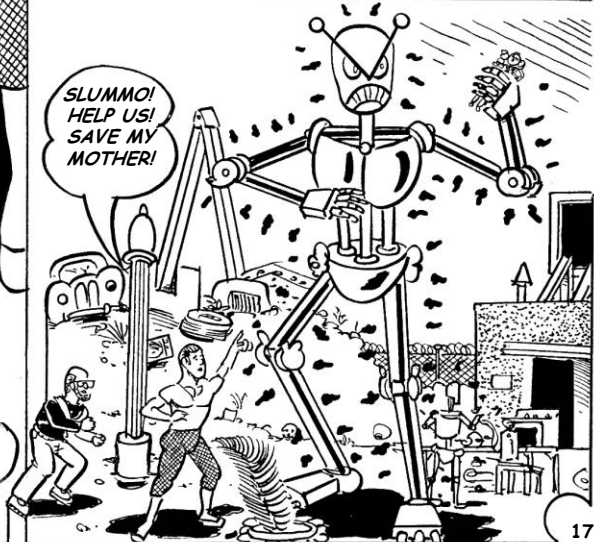


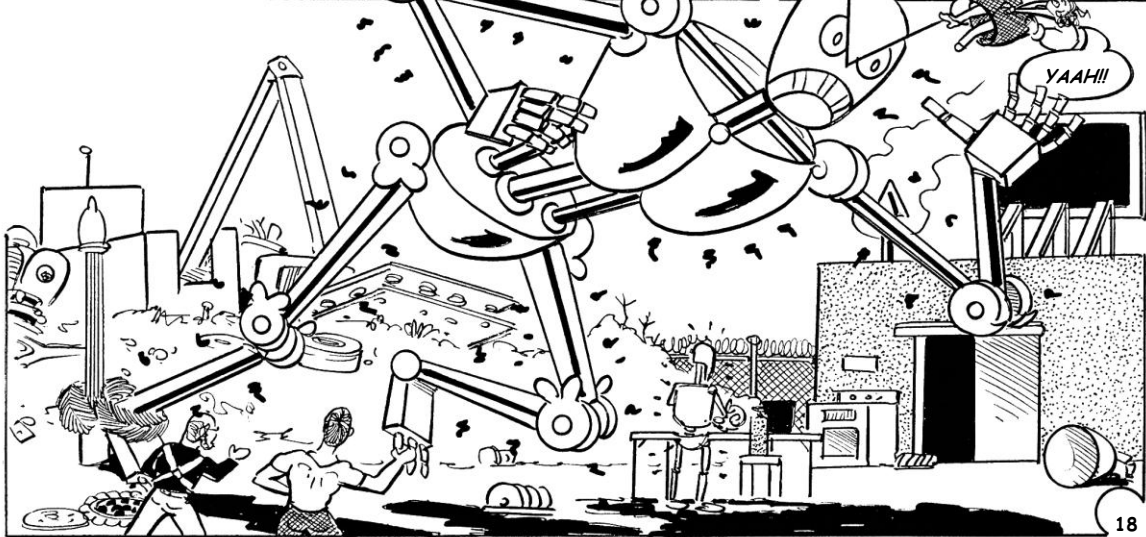
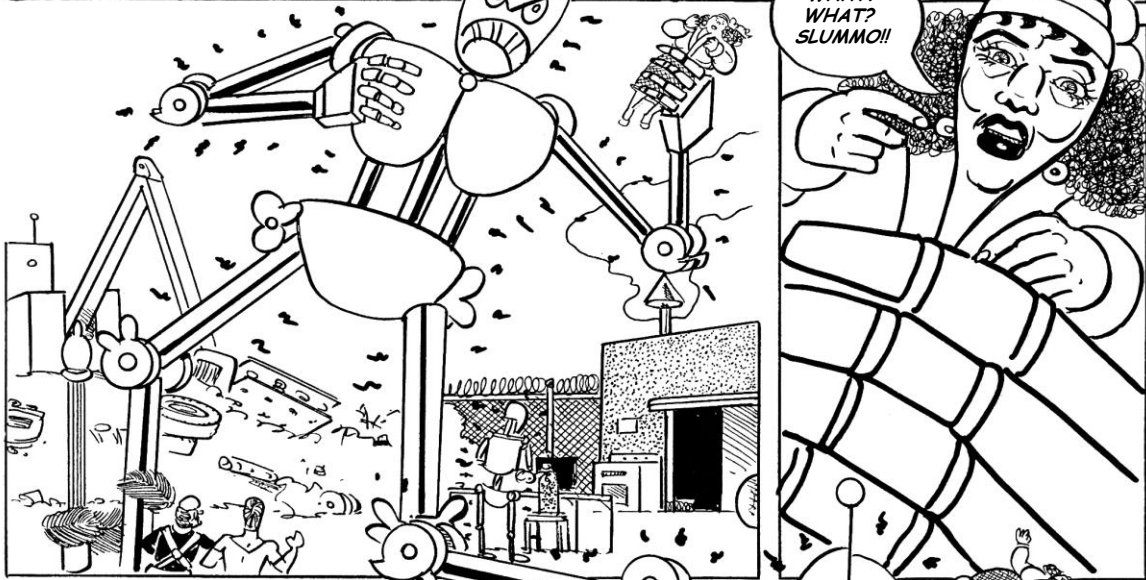
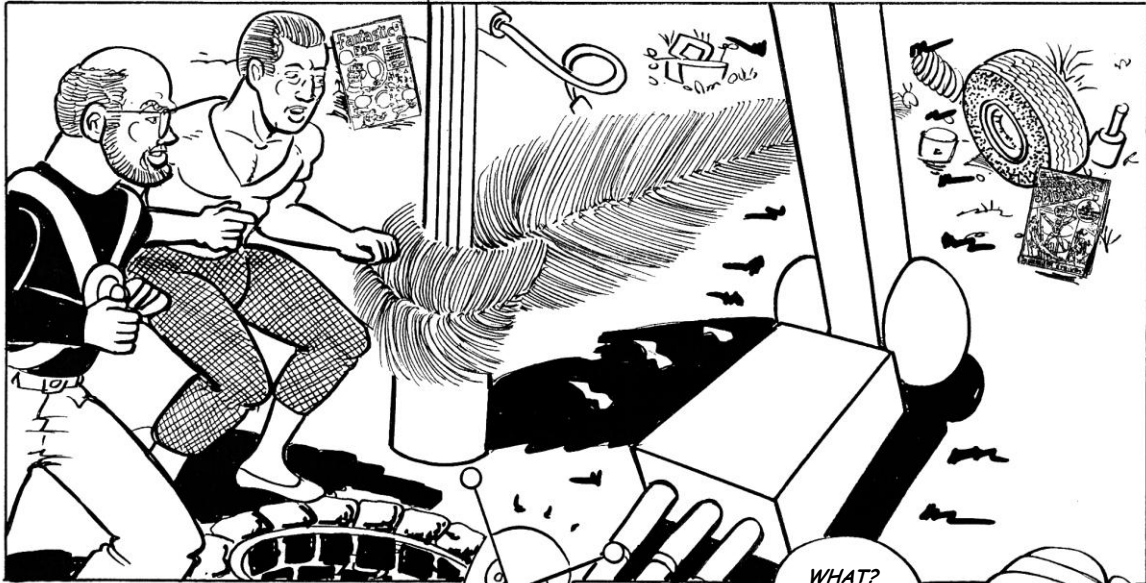




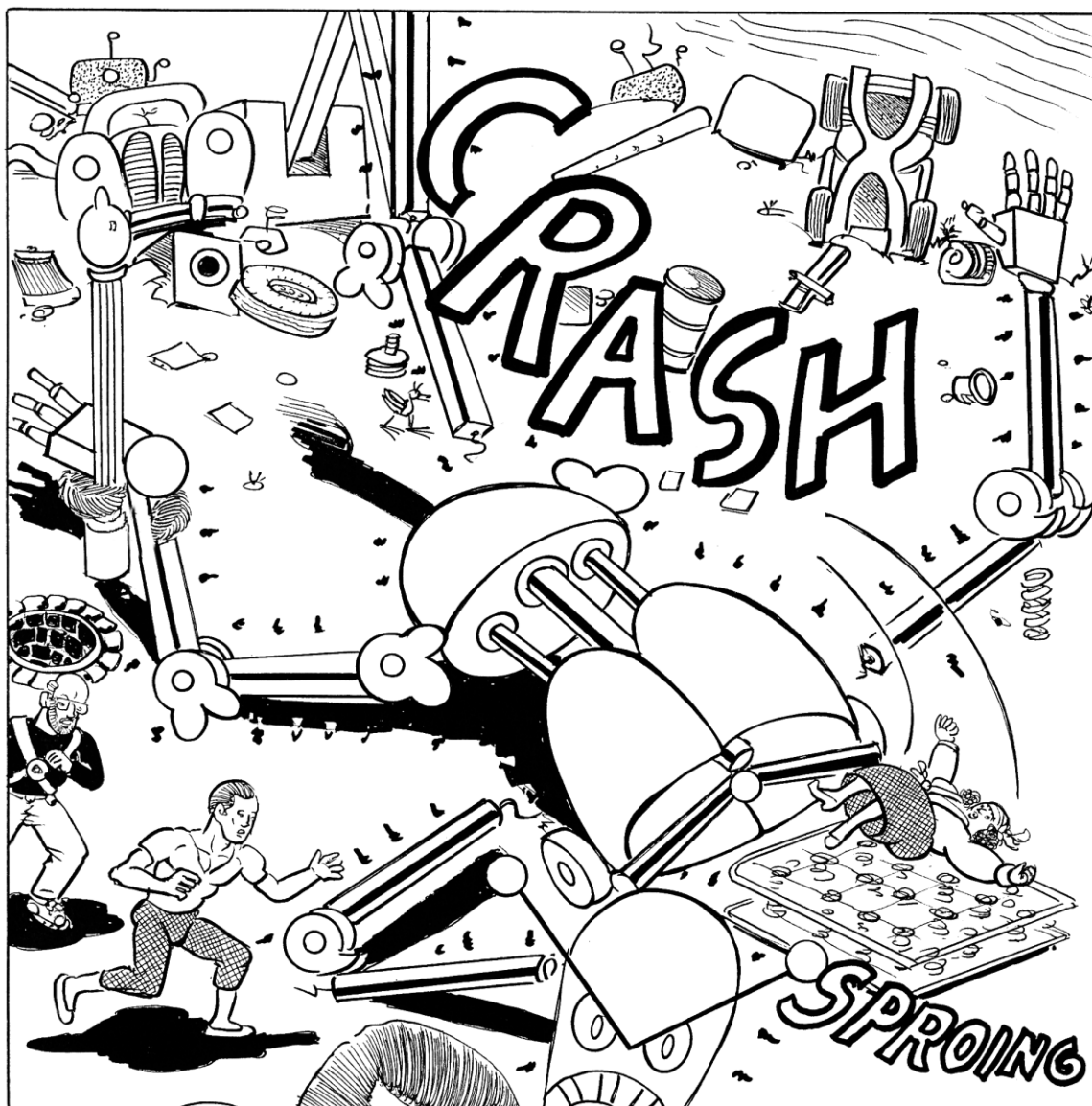


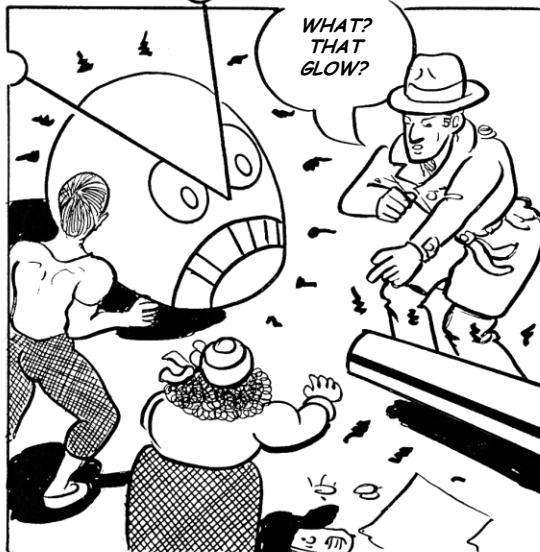


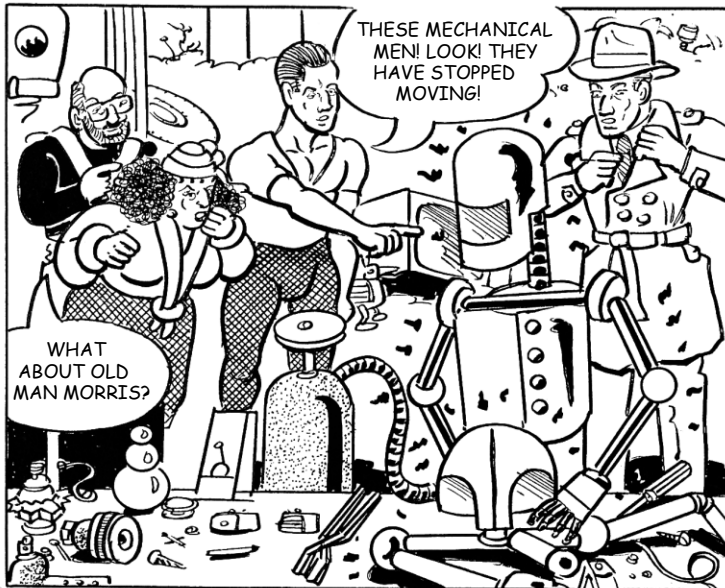


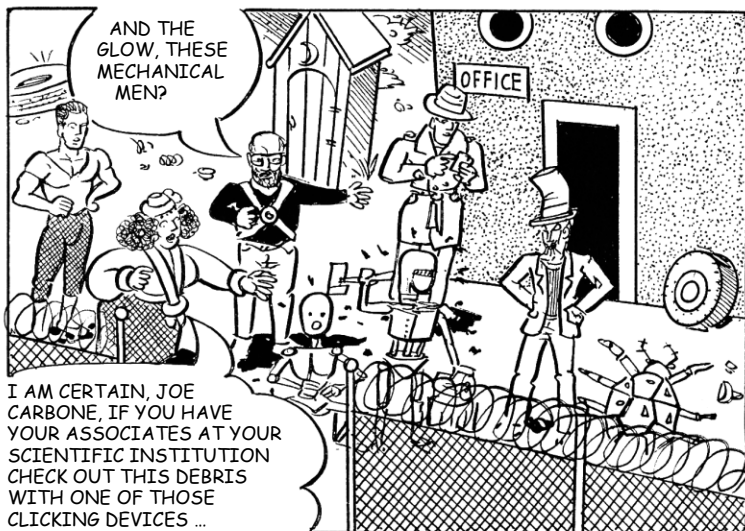




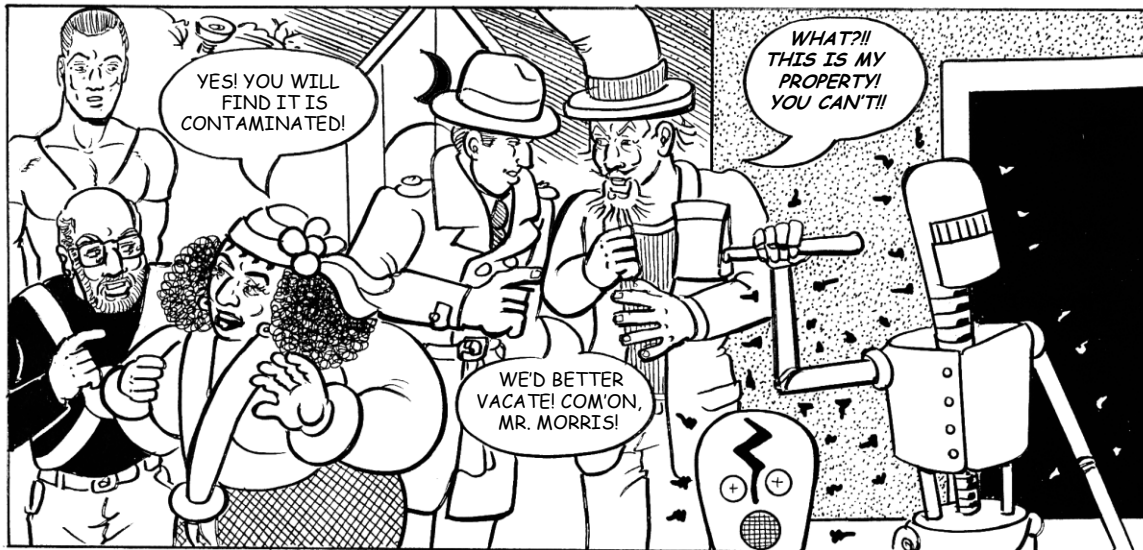












# Mark Merlin

*By Larry Johnson*

He battled his giant double, encountered ghosts bent on vengeance, deadly plant creatures, demons from other dimensions, exchanged minds with a cat, and near the end of his career took on a whole new persona. His name was Mark Merlin and he was a supernatural sleuth.

He wasn't the first magic-inspired hero to appear in the history of comics. Back in the golden age Fawcett's Ibis the Invincible had a healthy run and then there was Sargon the Sorcerer and even Marvelo Monarch of the Magicians from the pages of Big Shot

Comics. And predated them all was Lee Falk's Mandrake the Magician.



*Mark Merlin tangles with the powerful ghost of a witch in "The Threat of The Horrible Hex" (#64).*

Mark Merlin, unlike Mandrake who relied merely the powers of illusion and persuasion, was able to marshal various supernatural forces from different ages and cultures to assist him in his battles. His adventures debuted in House of Secrets #23 (August 1959) and continued until #73 (July 1965).

He was created by Mort Meskin, an artist who got his start at the dawn of the Golden Age of comics. While working in the Eisner and Iger shop he drew Sheena the Queen of the Jungle, and later for MLJ on the superheroes The Shield and the Wizard. He also illustrated DC's Vigilante, Starman and Johnny Quick (a competitor to the Flash).

Mr. Meskin had a clean direct economical style of drawing. He used inks in a skillful manner utilizing blacks and shadows to great advantage. Steve Ditko expressed his admiration for this artist's work.

In Mark Merlin's origin tale he investigated the mysterious death of his uncle, a stage magician. His uncle was involved in exposing fake supernatural



activity and Mark took up the mantle, using his uncle's mansion as his base of operations. His fiancée Elsa Magnusson served as his assistant and appeared with him in every tale in the series.

Sometimes Mark's investigations actually did prove fakery. For example in "The Secret of the Spectral Crimes!" (#56) he traveled to Scotland and Italy in search of a ghostly "highwayman" who was stealing art objects. It turned out to be a man whom Mark had previously exposed for bilking people of their money by promising them supernatural powers.

Sometimes the science of the modern world stimulated ancient magic as well. That was the case in "The Fantastic Flower Creatures" (#38). This took place at a movie set in England. It was to be a period piece and Mark was summoned to authenticate the set design.



*Mark brandishes "sacred firewood of the Andes" at the Morloo in "Dr. 7's Supernatural Ally!" (#67).*

Large mysterious flowers appeared on the scene and strange long stalk-like creatures emerged from them and immediately set to ravaging all the buildings the movie company had built. Mark discovered they were the result of an ancient curse from an evil sorcerer. They had been revived by radioactive experiments. Mark was able to lure them to the reactor plant, the site of the ancient castle – their point of origin – and subdue them.

Three different cultures came together in "Threat of the Horrible Hex" (#64) when Mark was summoned to Halzburg, Pennsylvania where he encountered the ghosts of a witch, an evil native American medicine man and a pirate who had learned African magic. They all emerged from Hex symbols on the side of a barn. Mark was able to release an ancient opponent of theirs from a fourth Hex symbol to defeat them in this lively tale.

And sometimes Mark Merlin was pitted against magicians who were able to draw forth "helpers" from other dimensions. That was the case for the evil Doctor 7 and the "Morloo!" In "Doctor 7's Supernatural Ally" (#67) the evil doctor summoned up this great tall green creature bent on destruction. Mark was able to defeat him by creating a



special potion, but he had to make sure he used a metal button from his girlfriend Elsa's blouse when creating it. He knew that the ancient Alchemists used a bronze mortar to create the same demon-defeating potion.

Mark had a long career but near the end of his run he went through one of the strangest transformations in the history of comics. He became an entirely different person. No, he didn't just take on a new secret identity. He actually died and came back a new man. In "The Death of Mark Merlin" (#73) his old foe The Gargoyle showed up and sent him to another dimension. It turned out to be the world of Ra, whose residents ages ago lived on earth in ancient Egypt. Mark longed to return to earth but was told he could not come back as himself. Instead he had to take on the persona of a young prince who had died and hence made his reappearance as Prince Ra-Man. This fellow, with a streak of white in his black hair and wearing a goatee appeared in Mark's place, quickly defeated the Gargoyle and introduced himself to his startled fiancée Elsa. He retained memories of Mark's life but essentially Mark Merlin was no more.

Ra-Man's adventures appeared for a little while longer, and he even teamed up with the book's co-feature Eclipso, but by issue #80 House of Secrets ended its original run, to be picked up a few years later as a supernatural anthology title.

Mark Merlin's adventures are examples of tight story telling by one of comicdom's early masters, and a fine contribution to the history of comics.

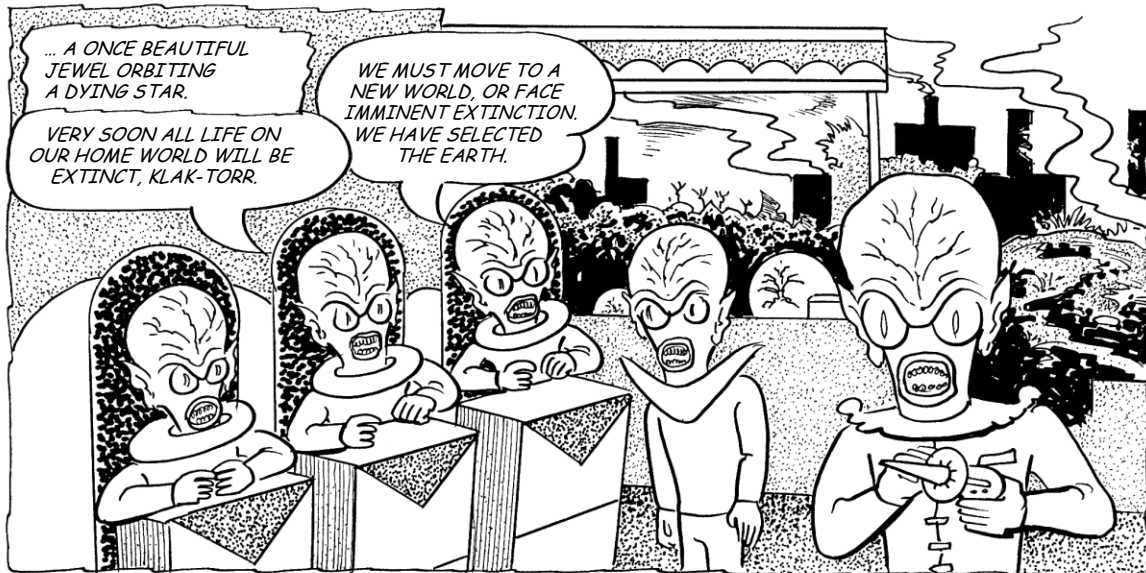
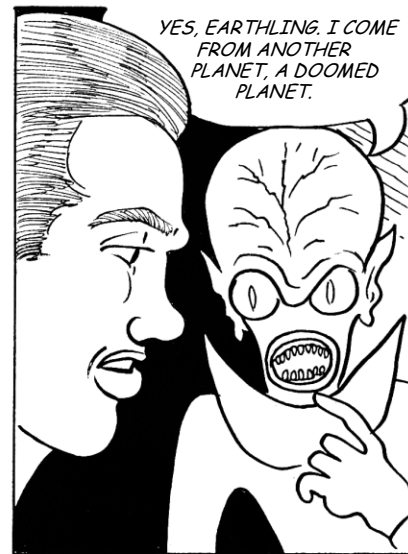
*Prince Ra-Man and Memakata in "Wizard of 1,000 Moods" (#74).*













WITH IT YOU CAN  
TAKE PHYSICAL  
POSSESSION OF ANY  
EARTHMAN'S BODY!



AS YOU MERGE,  
SO WILL YOUR  
MINDS. YOU WILL  
SHARE THEIR  
MEMORIES AND  
KNOWLEDGE.



THIS WILL  
ALLOW YOU TO  
EXIST AMONG  
THE HUMANS  
UNDETECTED.

BUT  
TAKE  
CARE!



YOU MUST RETURN  
TO YOUR NATURAL STATE  
WITHIN 72 HOURS OR YOU  
WILL BE ABSORBED BY  
THE HOST, FADING  
INTO NOTHINGNESS.

I UNDERSTAND,  
AND ACCEPT  
THE RISK.

GOOD!  
NOW HERE  
IS THE PLAN ...

USING YOUR BODY  
AND MIND I WILL  
GAIN ACCESS TO  
YOUR PRESIDENT, THEN  
TAKE POSSESSION  
OF HIM!

WITH THIS MODULATOR  
WE WILL TAKE CONTROL  
OF AMERICA'S KEY  
GOVERNMENTAL AND  
MILITARY LEADERS ...



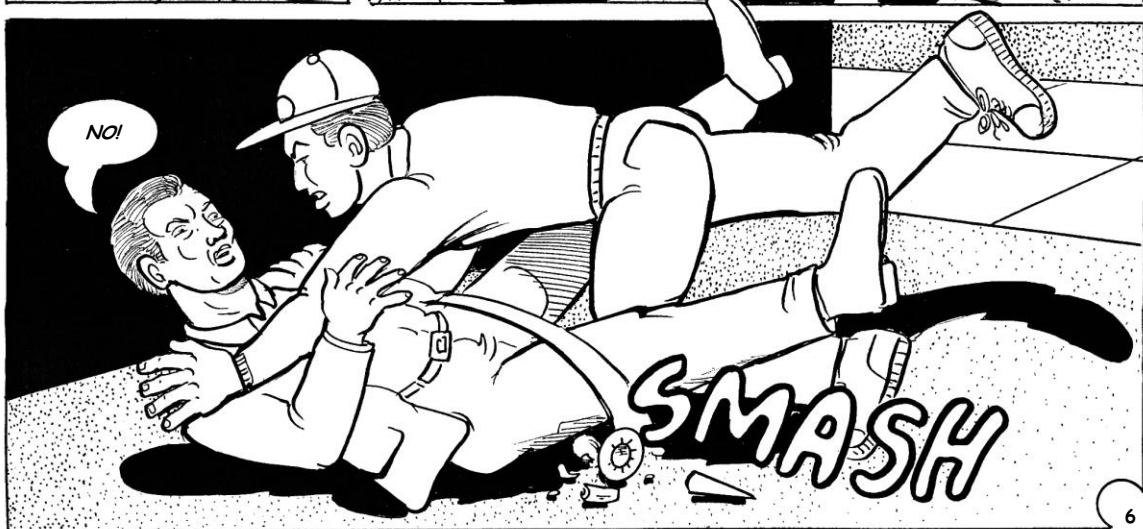
ONCE THAT IS  
DONE I SHALL  
BEGIN SUMMONING  
MY PEOPLE.

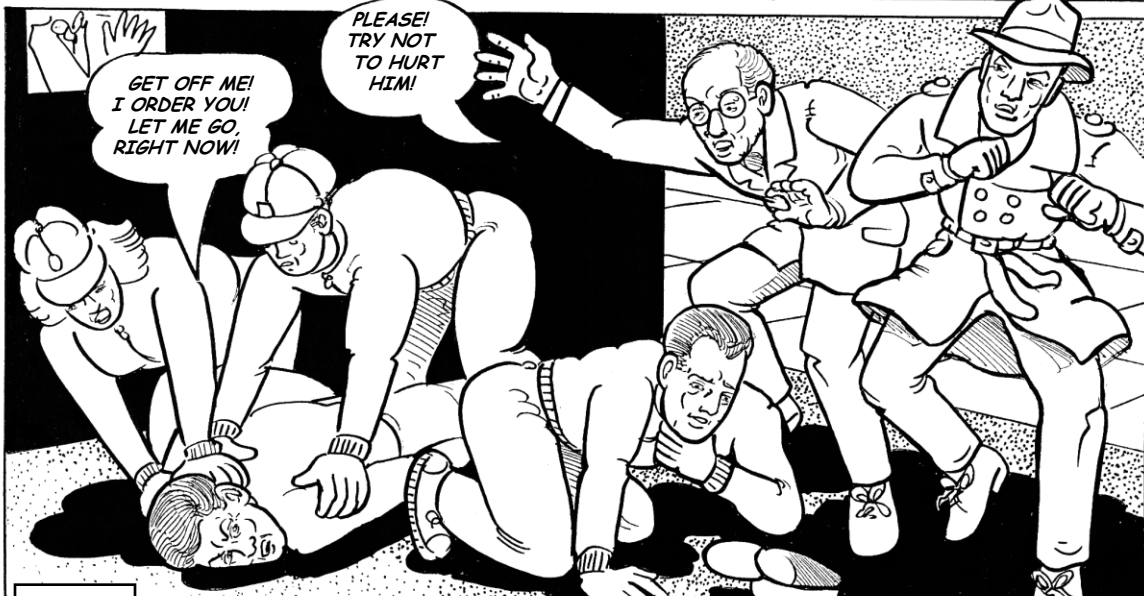


THEN DECLARE  
ALL-OUT NUCLEAR WAR  
ON THE OTHER NATIONS,  
ANNIHILATING MOST  
OF HUMANKIND!









SHORTLY...





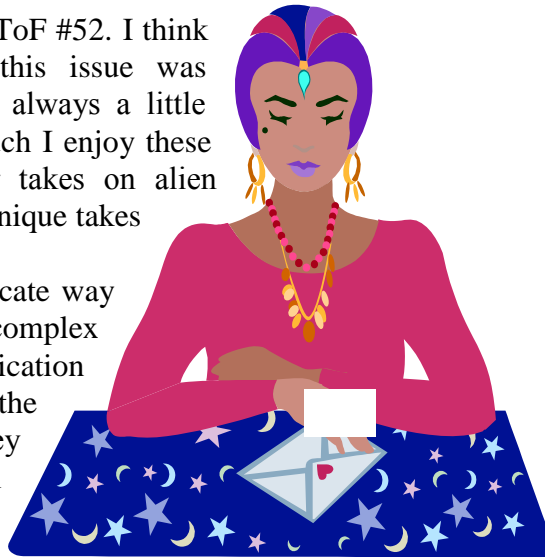


# Mails of Fantasy

**Jason Sacks**  
**11229 1<sup>st</sup> Ave. W.**  
**Everett, WA 98204**

I really enjoyed ToF #52. I think my favorite piece this issue was “Pansy Power”. I’m always a little surprised by how much I enjoy these “Bart Rover” stories with their very clever takes on alien societies – and this story had one of the most unique takes of any of these stories.

I was totally taken by surprise by the intricate way that the Mandrella life forms live, with their complex interrelationships and unique communication systems. This story, more than most others in the “Bart Rover” series, really represents a journey into a unique and very different society from the one that we live in. Morphelia is a very different planet, and I really enjoyed my journey there.



The story of how Bart became emotionally involved in his mission was especially fun. I loved the section on the next-to-last page of the story where Bart is battling his ecstasy in order to fulfill his mission. I really like how Bart always gets so involved in his cases. It makes an interesting point about how biology can dictate a being’s reactions, even when he knows intellectually that he needs to stay on mission.

That, in turn, helps to create a nice contrast with the idea of the androids becoming more sentient. It’s interesting to consider how a machine can change from being inflexible to believing “The hierarchy needs adjustment,” and I liked how this contrasted with Bart’s mission.

This story was really nicely rich in interesting themes. There’s lots of red meat to chew on here.

I’m a huge fan of Krazy Kat, so Space Cat this time made me laugh out loud. The juxtaposition of Herriman’s style with yours was fun to see – and it cracked me up how SC hated to be hit on the head with a brick!

It looks like Morphoté is back to battle with Madame Boogala in the opening story, and his plans to take on Brookston continue to move forward. I honestly didn’t feel that this story was your strongest, Larry. Too much of it depends on the characters being a bit passive and giving into their vices. I missed the strong emotional content that we’ve had the last two issues.

It’s not a bad story at all, though. You draw the heck out of it and I really enjoy the diversity of camera angles that you include in the story. The large image of Detective Koslowski on page 3, for instance, emphasizes the horror of the Detective taking a puff, while the final panel on page 11 is really nice at letting the readers know about the power that Vamra has over Madame Boogala at that moment.

And thanks for running the article by Robert Heinlein! I want to vacation on Mars this year; do you think Mr. Heinlein can help me?

► Well, Jason, first you'd have to survive the three-year journey, exposed to zero gravity and radiation. That's something the science fiction authors of the day had to consider in their future predictions. But considering all the technological advancements, who knows what life will be like 50 years from now. I'm glad you liked "Pansy Power". My take on the Bart Rover series isn't so much focused on the technology as the conflict of human-based approaches to alien worlds, and I'm planning some even more "outré" type adventures for Bart, dealing with issues he hasn't encountered before. Stay tuned! I really work on the art for each comic book story I do and struggle to visually portray the action as clearly and – I hope – to maintain the reader's interest. That was the case for "Up In Smoke." Now, for a different response to that story check out the next letter.

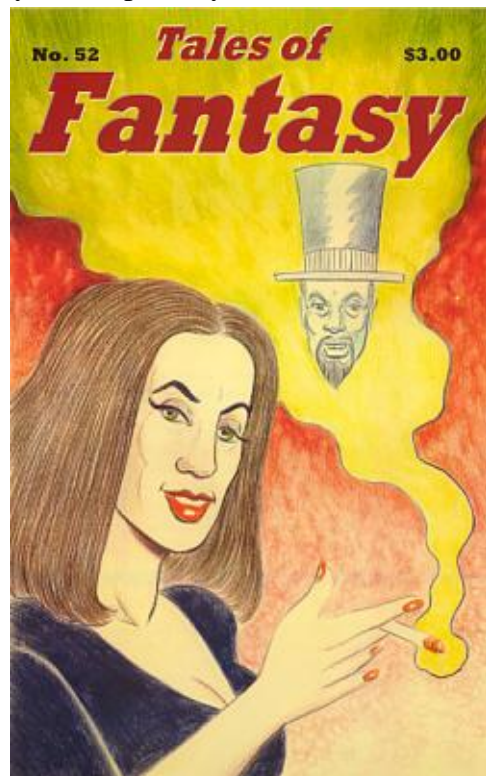
**Mike Tuz**  
**Box 182**  
**Bridgewater, CT 06752**

The story "Up In Smoke" in TOF #52 was another entertaining, yet unsettling, tale of Madame Boogala's Brookston.

As if cigarette smoking wasn't already bad enough, what with the risks of causing emphysema and lung cancer, you (and Morpho) had to add the Fumé Beasts to this toxic brew of tar and nicotine! A vile and foolish habit becomes even more dangerous. I guess now the surgeon general will have to add "possible lung infestation by parasitic mystical arthropods" to the warning labels on cigarettes.

I must confess that I have little sympathy for people who destroy their health willingly by using tobacco. Still, I hate to see anyone, especially those I care about, suffering its effects. I watched my father die a slow and torturous death from emphysema caused by forty-plus years of smoking. With the image of my dad struggling for each breath that he took during his final years of his life burned indelibly in my memory, the story of Detective Kolowski's collapse due to cigarettes had quite an impact on me. I like Kolowski! Even though I think he's an idiot for using tobacco it was disturbing to see him so afflicted.

As you may be able to tell, I'm pretty passionate in my anti smoking stance. I think that smoking has been one of the most insidious evils in our society over the past century. So it's most fitting that Morpho would use cigarettes as the vehicle to launch his most recent assault on mankind. Even the name of his cigarettes mirrors the Madison Avenue advertising campaigns to make tobacco products seem benign and appealing to the buying public, especially those ads targeting kids. "S'Morphoté" sounds a lot like



a chocolate, marshmallow and graham cracker snack that many folks associate with childhood campouts. (Although the skull pictured with the logo could be argued to be a rare example of truth in advertising!) This aspect of Morpho's deception is chilling in its accurate depiction of marketing practices by the tobacco industry.

Boogala's statement that she couldn't cure Kolowski's condition, only arrest it, was an appropriate conclusion. Even in this fantasy tale it's important to be reminded that the damage done by smoking cigarettes is not a problem that someone else can fix for us. Once the damage is done it can't be undone. Apparently not even by magic.

The look and name of Morpho's agent Vamra seems to be patterned after the 1950's TV Horror Movie Hostess Vampira. Your villainess isn't nearly as wasp-waisted, though. Vampira's alter ego, the Finnish former model Maila Nurmi was reported to have a 17" waist! Looking at her midriff in the movie "Plan 9 From Outer Space," I can believe it! Your character Vamra proved herself to be a worthy opponent for Boogala. Indeed, she might even have won their encounter if not for Goomar's intervention.

And on that topic, after all these years it was great to see Goomar as something more than his mother's stooge; to see his strength and self-assuredness. This Goomar is much more interesting a persona than the old subservient Goomar was. Over the years he's become a more complex, multi-faceted, more believable individual. And as such, more likeable.

Was it your intention that the dialog between Kolowski and Goomar in the second and third panels of page 2 invoke a comparison with The Cisco Kid? When I read the sequence all I could think of were the "Oh, Cisco!" and "Oh, Pancho!" exchanges between Loe Carrillo and Duncan Renaldo in those old radio and TV shows.

Nice to see Slummo creeping about Brookston again. I just hope that he (it?) doesn't take up smoking now that he's got all those cases of coffin nails in his subterranean lair.

I think everyone will agree with your editorial page assessment that "Pansy Power" was the strangest Bart Rover adventure yet. Having him morph into a symbiotic colony of life forms this time was a pretty weird concept. His anxiety over losing and then trying to regain some of his components was quite amusing. I like the first person point of view narrative of these stories, and the fact that we see such intimate detailed descriptions of the creatures that Bart turns into but we have no idea what his true form is. Please don't spoil the mystery!

It was fascinating to read Heinlein's predictions for the world in the year 2000 as written midway through the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The fact that he made such bold predictions, only two of which actually came to pass, is an indication of how much promise the future seemed to hold then, and how far into the



future the year 2000 seemed to people in 1952. Either he was overly optimistic or we squandered the last half of the last century. Interesting to note that he got it right on every count in his list of things that wouldn't happen within the next fifty years.

His observation of the growing crisis over the organization and accessibility of knowledge was the most intriguing, as was his plea for a "new science to be secretary to all other sciences." He sounded particularly pessimistic about that one happening, although it sounds a lot like the Internet. Nobody saw that coming sixty years ago!

And to round things out we got treated to two installments of Space Cat, one in the Herriman Universe and the other beset by robot mice. Yow!

Thanks a bunch, Larry!

► *You're welcome, Mike! I always appreciate your thoughtful assessment. You know, I don't think there's one person reading this who has not had either a relative or a friend of the family who has suffered the ill effects of cigarette smoking. When I was a kid I spent many weekends with my grandmother and her brother Charlie Brown. My Uncle Charlie smoked at various times pipes, cigars and cigarettes. I remember he was fond of Camels, the unfiltered kind of course. He died of emphysema at age 71. There is an occasional rare moment these days when I'm walking down the street and pass someone who is smoking a cherry-flavored cigar. I get a whiff – and I know it's unhealthy – but I'm swept up in a nostalgic feeling for my Uncle Charlie since I was so fond of him, smoking and all.*

Yes, indeed, Vamra is based on TV horror hostess Vampira! I thought she was appropriately creepy enough for a model for my character. By the way, I remember reading that Maili Nurmi based that look on Charles Addams' Morticia. I think she was leery of copyright infractions. Some years later we had Carolyn Jones giving her more sweet sexy interpretation to that role!

I had never seen the Cisco Kid in my youth. Our stations didn't carry it, so that exchange between Goomar and Detective Kolowski was pure coincidence.

And readers, I hope you enjoyed "Klak-torr The Conqueror!" the collaborative effort Mike and I produced this issue!





**Perry Lake  
6167-B Alamo Way  
Paradise, CA 95969-4202**

As I despise the habit of smoking, I naturally enjoyed “Up In Smoke” in *Tales Of Fantasy* #52. It was a nice little tale that showed the dangers of smoking. I liked the throwaway line, “The tobacco smell is even more offensive than burning Krystol leaves.”

Also nice was the rendition of Vamra as the old television hostess, Vampira. I was intrigued to see that she resents Boogala for having been Morpho’s favored apprentice, an idea I introduced in *TOF* #31. With that kind of resentment, she could make a nice reoccurring foil for Boogala.

Your reprint of that Heinlein article was thought provoking and a good starting point for friendly arguments. It reminded me of a 1930 issue of *Popular Mechanics* I found in 1980, telling what technology would be like in fifty years, and it was equally inaccurate. I recall it had a picture of a three-story high train racing across the cover.

Of the nine impossibilities Heinlein mentions, only humanlike robots are right around the corner. The Internet has largely answered his “great crisis” of the organization of human knowledge.

As I was reading the first part of “Pansy Power” I thought it was more like an interesting collection of clever ideas than a story. Then I got to where Bart finds the target robot already destroyed and I realized here is the start of the story.

I do like how you show the life and experiences of Bart from the Mandrella point of view, like turning his forty-eight faces towards the sun or comparing the taste of dirt to a chocolate cake. This is what science fiction should be about: showing us things that are wildly different from our own experiences.

I wonder if “Bud” and “Pal” are actually names, or just references: bud and pal. I wonder how many of your readers recognize Beanie and Cecil?

Favorite line: “The moment was at hand. I yanked! I pulled! I never felt such ecstasy!”

There wasn’t much to the Space Cat episode, but it was nice to see the beloved Ignatz Rat and Krazy Kat again.

► *Thanks, Perry. You’ll notice at the end of “Up In Smoke” there’s mention that a body was found in the smoke shop. It might have been Vamra’s or it may not have been! Indeed, she may prove to be a formidable rival to Madame Boogala in the future. Your idea of Morpho serving as mentor to Boogala ages ago in “When Old Friends Meet” (#31) was a factor in this tale.*

*You have to be a certain age, I guess, to get the Beanie and Cecil reference. I remember the Bob Clampett cartoon show from the 1960s, but it predates that as a puppet show in the 1950s from California, performed by Stan Freiberg and Dawes Butler (do any readers wonder who these two guys are? You can look them up on Google if so!).*

*I got a hoot over how you referred to “Ignatz Rat,” Herriman called him “Ignatz Mouse!”*

**Larry Blake**  
**69306 St. Rte. 124**  
**Reedsville, OH 45772**

Wild cover, Larry! Morpho in the sickly yellow smoke seems to indicate a weird hallucination, but the woman's face looks very knowing and evil! All in all it seems intriguing! Nice colored pencil work!

I'd never dreamed of basing a story on smoking. I lost my dad to that vile habit and you'll seldom see me drawing a smoker! If I do – you can bet it's to show how DISGUSTING a villain is!

Your art continues to develop. You're getting better and better at spotting black and using textures! The line work seems both more controlled and more energetic.

Story wise – we get another glimpse of Madame Boogala's past and an advancement of sub-plots that have been slowly building for a while!

It's interesting to see more of Boogala's abilities on display! I recognize some objects in her shop from archeology magazines I've read!

Smoke and cigarettes as a magical weapon is a great idea! It points out the bizarre insanity of a "product" that KILLS its buyers and users!

Morpho's assistant Vamra is no doubt based on Vampira that most movie buffs will remember from her creepy scenes in a "Plan Nine From Outer Space!"

I really enjoyed seeing Goomar take such an active heroic role – disguised as Detective Kolowski and rescuing his mother!

Cool story! Good, vital, IMPORTANT point well made!

Fun seeing that 1952 piece from Galaxy Magazine! Some of the predictions seem more like wishful thinking! What Mr. Heinlein concluded we "needed" sounds a lot like the modern use of computers.

Ah! A new Bart Rover story! Again you turn your talents to doing the sort of material you've enjoyed in old SF digest magazines!

I like the way you worked in references to earlier Bart Rover stories – it creates a nice feeling of continuity and reality!

The descriptive bits about what it was like to become and function as a "group" of plants was very imaginative and detailed. As well thought out as it was ODD! I like these SF stories. It seems like you've got a continuing sub-theme going on with the androids developing real sentience! It'll be interesting to see how this will impact on Bart's job!

LOVED Space Cat this time! I'm a big fan of KRAZY and friends! Recently I was watching "Futurama" Season 5 and there was an episode where "space cats" take over Earth! They even had a cat-headed ship! You should seek out and watch that one, Larry! You may need to see a lawyer!

Every issue of TOF is a delight, Larry! Thanks for them all!



► *I guess I'm not the only one to come up with the Space Cat idea, huh? He made his first appearance in a story I wrote in 1992 ("Uncle Lew's Clubhouse" TOF #9). He was certainly a different character back then, he talked and was employed by Morpho of all people! See, all my characters have some relationship to each other! You might even see him in a poster or a billboard on the streets of Brookston now and then too.*

*Someone asked me a while back that question most artists hate to be asked: "Where do you get your ideas?" Well the answer is from everywhere. A few years ago I got a DVD set of 150 TV Detective shows from the 1950s. Everyone smokes in those shows! Sometimes the cigarette sponsor's ads are even integrated into the plot. That was pretty common in TV and the movies back then. When I created Detective Kolowski I wanted him to be "hard boiled" and even though he turned out to be a little softer in personality than I had originally intended I knew that giving him the cigarette habit would imbue a certain old fashioned detective feeling about him. In fact I've used Humphrey Bogart as a visual reference, and – not surprisingly – Mr. Bogart died of a smoking-related disease. So, after portraying Detective Kolowski in this manner for so long I started to wonder about the effect his cigarette smoking would have on his health. And, well, we're in the city of Brookston where weird things happen as a matter of course so I figured the little "Fumé Beasts" would live in the smoke, and so ...*

**Rob Imes**

**13510 Cambridge #307  
Southgate, MI 48195**

*Tales of Fantasy #52 was another satisfying issue. Every aspect of the issue was so well done that it's hard to find things to criticize. And your characters have taken on such a life of their own that it's hard to say that any one of them is in need of improvement. The creepy little bugs that were expelled by Detective Kolowski were a classic touch. It's bad enough that smoking can cause cancer, but the image of those little horned creatures inhabiting one's body makes it even more revolting. And of course Madame Boogala again has the glass jar and tweezers brought out to capture the tiny critters, which adds a further grotesque touch to the scene.*

*Boogala using her spirit glasses to trace Kolowski's footsteps back to the cigarette store is amusing in its fairy-tale quality. From the moment we see her in the store's doorway, the reader knows that Vamra is up to no good. It's interesting to note that Boogala can change her appearance into that of a beautiful young woman, as she does on page 9-10, which raises some questions about why she wouldn't want to look that way all the time. Perhaps the illusion takes too much mental energy to sustain for long periods. And perhaps she doesn't care about the opinions of others regarding her looks anyway.*

*The way in which Goomar is able to fool Vamra into thinking he is Kolowski by simply wearing his familiar trench coat and hat (with the collar pulled up) was a brilliantly funny move. In this case it looks like clothes really do make the man ... what*

would Kolowski be like without them? The ending of the story was handled well. I'm glad that this story didn't get too explanation-heavy in the second half. The tale as a whole lived up to the promise of its premise. The front cover was great as usual – the perfect cover for the story.

The Bart Rover text story “Pansy Power” was one of the weirdest tales I've ever read, and one that is best suited for the prose format. Prose gives

the reader a sense of intimacy with the narrator as well as clearer explanations of what is going on. If this were a comic, a lot of the information that the reader needs couldn't be adequately conveyed visually. For example the scenes where the fronds of the Mandrellas break off and join together would just look like a jumbled mess if told in comics form. In prose, the horror of Bart's predicament, being separated from six of the fronds that make up himself, is conveyed better.

This was an imaginative and bizarre story that, like the previous Bart Rover tales, had the flavor of classic science fiction. I have to agree with Larry Blake who suggested, in this issue's letter page, that you do an entire issue of TOF in the format of an old Galaxy type magazine. Incidentally, have you considered submitting these stories to any of the current s.f. magazines?

The Space Cat one-page tribute to Krazy Kat was great, as was the colorful back cover. It's hard to pick a favorite Space Cat strip, but this one is definitely one of my favorites of all that you've done. I wish more people were seeing this silent strip, since it has such universal appeal.

Thanks again for another great issue, Larry! I think I enjoyed this one more than the last two issues (good as those were). TOF is a treasure, but one that I think many comics readers have not yet discovered. Do you have any plans or ideas for increasing TOF's readership, or thoughts on what we readers can do to help spread the word?



► *What a fan! Thanks, Rob for your support! I'm glad you enjoyed "Up In Smoke." I approached this in a classic manner, hoping that there might be enough surprises to keep readers interested and enough familiar elements to be amusing and entertaining. Boogala has on occasion used illusion to change her looks in the past. It takes some energy of course, but like a good stage magician it also requires a certain kind of belief system in her audience and Vamra was just a little too smart for that. Boogala really has no concern for her looks; after all she's around 700 years old now! Hmm, that may be a proposal for a new story!*

*I really liked your assessment of my prose writing abilities for the Bart Rover story, Rob. About 10 years ago I tried my hand at prose fiction, having done comics all my life. It was a challenge and I remember some comments from readers on those early efforts. "This would be a good shooting script," one said.*



*And that made sense since I had a cinematic approach to the visual medium for comics for so long. There is a different approach in doing a comic book script I've found. There's a lot of emphasis on the dialogue for example, but as I went along writing more and more prose fiction I started to capitalize on getting into my character's thoughts and feelings more so. You can really emphasis the emotion more in text than in the visual format I've found (now, maybe someone else feels differently and if so I'd like to hear from them).*

*I am concerned with the "voice" of the narrator, Bart's voice, and he has a certain smart aleck-y personality. I've found that you have to think about whom he's telling the story to as well. He may be a bit more ribald talking to some buddies at a bar instead of some elderly ladies at a tea party, for example. And in any series I attempt to write each story as if it were an introduction to a new reader, and that means someone familiar with the characters and situations could get more out of it too.*

*Tales of Fantasy #34 (currently out of print) was an all text fiction issue, in the style of the old science fiction magazines and introduced Bart Rover, by the way.*

*A couple years ago right before we moved I was looking up some science fiction and fantasy magazines to submit these stories to. There's a website: [fantasy.fictionfactor.com](http://fantasy.fictionfactor.com) that lists these markets. I seemed to have gotten distracted since then. I was thinking of Alfred Hitchcock Magazine for "The Red magazine too.*

*I think any creative person reading this is aware of the balance between actually producing good material and the time and energy it takes to get those stories out to an audience. The effort of presentation and promotion is time consuming and a lot of people will tell you that it's a lot of effort for very little reward.*

*And that brings me to your question about increasing Tales of Fantasy's readership. Don't think I haven't tried. There was a time when I would send out copies to review websites, but I haven't done that in the last few years. There was a trickle of response to those reviews. And in 2009 I was interviewed in the 'zine Small Press Extra which was distributed at SPACE (the small press comics convention) in Ohio. I received no response from that exposure. So last year I joined the UFO (The United Fanzine Organization) and Tales of Fantasy was listed on the checklist, which has appeared in a number of publications since last summer. It has garnered almost no response as well.*

*Someone had mentioned that small press exists in little "pocket" groups of creators who know each other and rarely "cross-pollinate". Oh, I've used some of that promotional energy for other purposes this past year, namely to get my How To Make Comic Book course going at my local arts center, and I'm happy to say I've had some moderate success with that (and I get paid for it too). A number of*

people locally have learned about *Tales of Fantasy*, but my readership has not increased appreciably. In March I'll be interviewed on a local Cable TV show, so we'll see how that goes.

I know I speak for a number of self-publishers who chug along because they love producing comics and stories, and get pleasure out a small yet devoted audience. Yes, I'd like a larger audience, and then of course you have the aspect of "web comics" to consider as well. I just don't have the mind and inclination to get into that end of things, although I will readily admit that the Internet has changed things a lot during the last 20 years, in some ways fragmenting connections

more than in the old days when we had just a few organs of promotion like *Small Press Explosion* and *Factsheet Five*. A mention in either of those publications would get me dozens of orders.



Well, readers, this wraps up another issue of *Tales of Fantasy*. This is a UFO issue going out to each member. This co-op has been around for over 40 years in one incarnation or another, and its mission is to promote quality in small press. I hope I've been able to live up to those standards.

Next issue, well, I don't know yet! I've got plenty of material. I script on average one new comic book story each month. I also have some collaborative work coming up. At any rate I hope it will be entertaining and make you want to come back for more! You can check out my website for more information and if you feel like writing a letter of comment on this issue I'd love to hear from you!



