Comic Scene Vol2 Issue 11 13-11-19 backupt.qxd_Layout 1 13/02/2020 13:10 Page 1

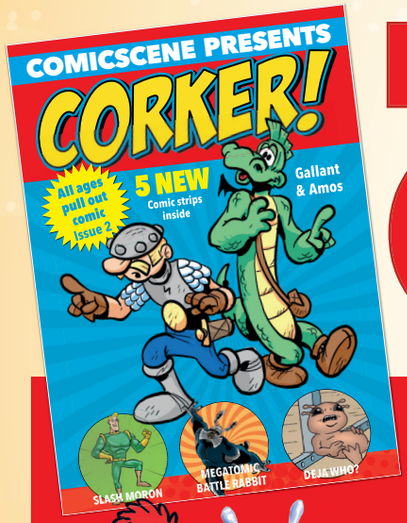
VIZ AT FORTY & DOCTOR WHO

COMIC SCENE

Your Complete Guide to Comics

AWARD WINNERS





FREE PULL OUT COMIC

REVIEW OF 2019



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COMICSCENE AWARDS

Welcome to our final issue of the year where we review 2019 and look forward to 2020.

This issue we are announcing the winners of our first ever ComicScene Awards.

Through our social media channels you nominated your favourites. They were whittled down to the final vote. 30,000 of you voted with some very active campaigning going on to get support for the comics and creators. This led to some surprises and we are pleased to announce the final winners and runners up here. Well done to everyone who was nominated – there was some great work out there during 2019 and Richard Bruton takes a closer look in his Review of 2019. Thank you to everyone who nominated, voted and promoted great comics.



These are truly your awards and ComicScene aims to be your magazine. I hope you will join us and subscribe today at **getmycomics.com/comicscene**

Yours aye, Tony.

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COMICSCENE AWARDS

Comic Shop UK and Ireland

WINNER – Comic Den Oldham

Runner Up - Orbital

A convincing win for Comic Den with a lot of love and support. Despite the changes Orbital in London are having, more to be announced in 2020, they also ended quite strong.

Bookshop for Graphic Novels

WINNER – Travelling Man

Runner Up - Page 45

A close run race but Travelling Man just pipped Page 45 at the post.

Best Library

WINNER – Renfrewshire Libraries

Runner Up - Dundee Libraries

The first set of libraries to take ComicScene. Perhaps this helped pip Dundee Libraries at the final hurdle.

Best Comic Con or Event

WINNER – Enniskellen Comic Con

Runner Up - Oldham Comic Con

Another close run vote but in the end Enniskillen romped home with the award.

Best Cosplay

WINNER – Michael Chandler

Runner Up - Possum Queen Cosplay

Best Movie / Tv Show

WINNER – THE BOYS

Runner Up - Avengers Endgame

A very close race with Endgame looking to destroy everything in its wake and then The Boys stole the show!

Best Comic Movie Actor / Actress

WINNER - Mark Hamill

Runner Up - Tom Holland

Mark, Tom, Joquain were all hot favourites as votes came in but looks like the force and his Joker laugh ruled the day for Mark Hamill

Best Comic Merchandise

WINNER - Carlos Ezquerra Lawgiver

Runner Up - Funko

Never…in…doubt.

Best new comic / graphic novel UK

WINNER - Hilda And The Mountain King By Luke Pearson

Runner Up - Power Boot Camp

A great campaign for votes nearly edged it for Power Boot Camp but Hilda got to the top of the mountain. Both all ages comics.

Best classic reprint UK

WINNER - Ramsey's Raiders

Runner Up - Leopard From Lime Street Book 2

A win for DC Thomson and their first coloured oversized reprint of the popular Commando Comics team. Issue 2 is out now.

Best Manga

WINNER - My Hero Academia

Runner Up - One Punch Man

Never…in…doubt… from Viz Media

Best Comic Fan Who you gonna call?

WINNER - Colin Noble

Runner Up - Tony Esmond

Best Comic Media

WINNER - Down the tubes Website

Runner Up - 1977-2000AD Facebook Page

Those 1977-2000AD boys went for it and at the final hurdle knocked the Awesome Comic Pod out of the way but experience ruled the day with John Freeman and his brilliant Down The Tubes website steadily picking up votes during the whole period of voting.

Congratulations to both but while Dan can take away the Crowdfunding Campaign for Rok the God Zoe takes this years Comic Creator to Watch Award.

Best Web Comic

WINNER - Aces Weekly

Runner Up - Penned-Guin by Alan Henderson

Another close run vote but Aces Weekly froze out Penned-Guin from the top spot.

Best Comic Character UK and Ireland

WINNER - Judge Dredd

Runner Up - Megatomic Battle Rabbit

Proving he is the law this was never in doubt but pleasing to see Megatomic Battle Rabbit did well against other established characters for second place.

Best Comic Character US/World

WINNER - Batman

Runner Up - Spider-man

It looked like Batman was going to walk this but a late flurry of Spider-man votes made it a closely run contest.

Best Comic Publisher UK & Ireland

WINNER - Rebellion

Runner Up - Self Made Hero

This was never in doubt and with announcements during the campaign of their plans for 2020 collections and new editions of Action, Battle and several other titles during 2020 they got comic fans very excited.

Best Comic Writer

WINNER - Al Ewing

Runner Up - Brian Azzarello

The votes for Best Writer, Artist, Colourist and Letterer were all very, very close but in the end Ewing, Flint, Manco and Parkhouse won the day. Now how would you like to see a comic from that creative team?

Best Comic Artist

WINNER - Henry Flint

Runner Up - Greg Capullo

Best Comic Colourist

WINNER - Leonardo Manco

Runner Up - Elisabeth Brietweiser

Best Comic Letterer

WINNER - Annie Parkhouse

Runner Up - Jim Campbell

Best New Comic Creator To Watch

WINNER - Zoe Thorogood

Runner Up - Dan Cornwell

This was close. Very close between two new kids on the block who are breaking through as one's to watch. Congratulations to both but while Dan can take away the Crowdfunding Campaign for Rok the God Zoe takes this years Comic Creator to Watch Award.

Best Comic Publisher US / World

WINNER - Image

Runner Up - DC

Another vote that was never in doubt for first and second place.

Most Memorable Comic Moment

WINNER - Moore & O'Neill. League of Extraordinary Gentlemen

Runner Up - Death of Judge Hershey

Alan Moore retired from comics this year. We thought it might put him in good stead for the Lifetime Achievement Award but you decided to go for his final work with Kevin O'Neill instead. It only just edged the Death of Judge Hershey in 2000AD which you all felt quite emotional about too

Looking Forward to in 2020

WINNER - Trigan Empire

Runner Up - The Immortal Hulk

Looked like Hulk was gonna smash the Trigan Empire before the end of voting but a few reveals of Trigan Empire hardcover covers, with artwork by Chris Weston, pushed you over the edge with excitement.

Best Crowdfunding Campaign

WINNER - Rok The God

Runner Up - Etherington Brothers

The Rok the God crowdfunding campaign was in full swing when we were running the voting so had extra support – thank goodness it made its target too! Not Lorenzo Ethrington crowdfunding numbers but who can come close to that?

Best Indie / Small Press Comic

WINNER - Combat Colin By Lew Stringer

Runner - Up Edge Of Extinction

Killing Moon and Edge of Extinction were fighting it out for second place but Combat Colin beat off the competition. Perhaps a reflection of Lew mentioning he'd never won an award or the end of his Blimey! Blog perhaps but the work was a popular choice too.

Best new comic / graphic novel US/world

WINNER - Batman Damned

Runner Up - Are You Listening by Tillie Walden

Batman has won a few ComicScene Awards – this is the first. Tillie Walden's story about friendship, grief and healing wasn't far behind.

Best classic reprint US / World

WINNER - Killing Joke

Runner Up - DC The New Frontier Black Label edition

Probably one of the most popular reprinted books from DC Comics from Alan Moore and Brian Bolland so no real surprises here but the Black Label Edition of the New Frontier came very close.

Comic Creator Lifetime Achievement Award

WINNER Writer: John Wagner Artist: Cam Kennedy

We are talking about single votes in it between Pat Mills and John Wagner and Cam Kennedy and Alan Davis. Between these two beasts there was nothing in it – so felt this year we'd celebrate writer and artist for the ComicScene Lifetime Achievement Award. Well done to to John and Cam and thanks for all the work you've given, and continue to give, us comic fans.

Subscribe to ComicScene for 2020 at getmycomics.com/comicscene and follow us on our websites, facebook, twitter and Instagram feeds too



ROK of the REDS

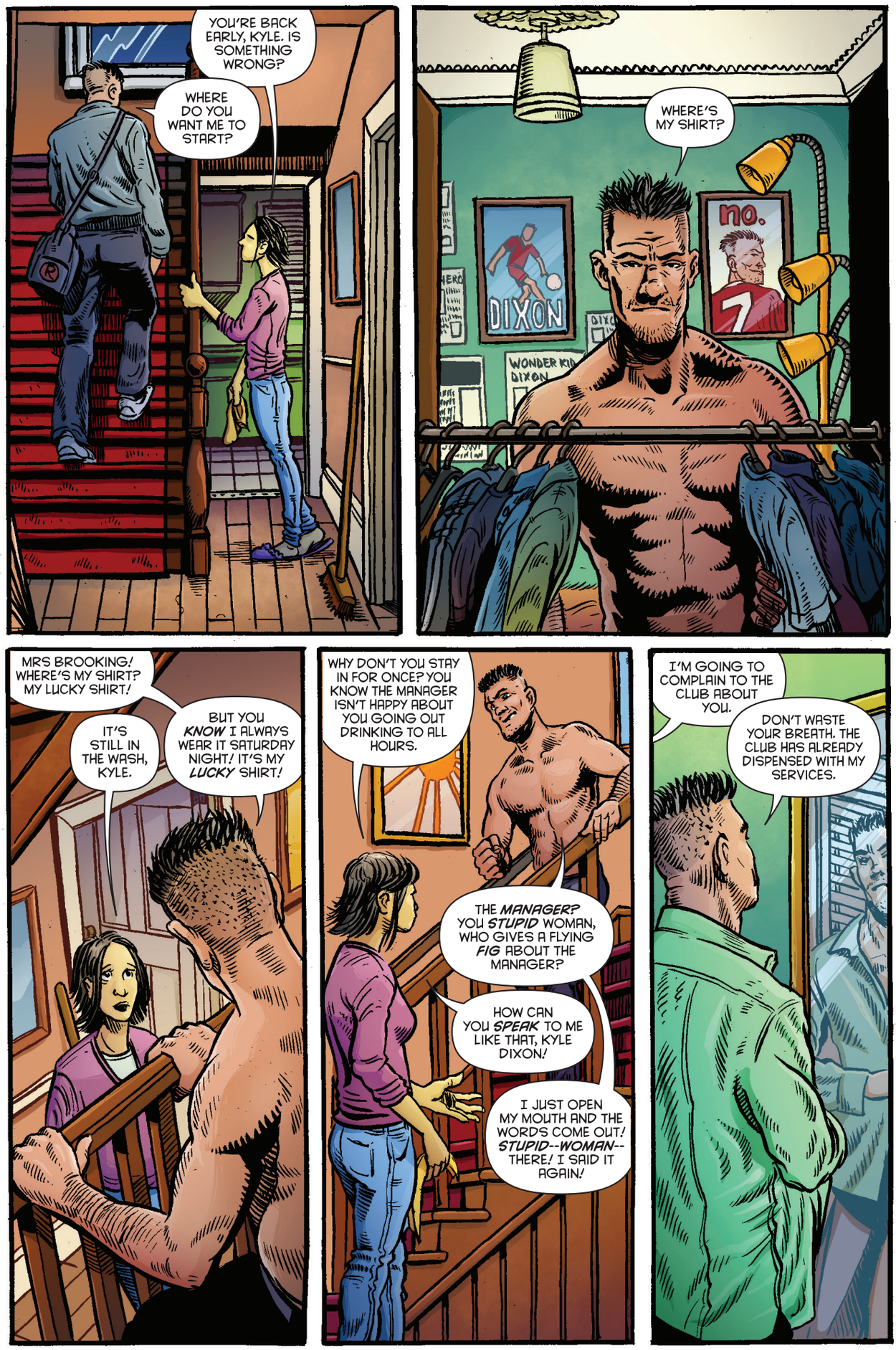
PART TWO

*AT THE **RADFORD REDS** GROUND BAD BOY FOOTBALLER **KYLE DIXON** HAS BEEN **SENT OFF...** AGAIN!*








YOU'RE BACK EARLY, KYLE. IS SOMETHING WRONG?
WHERE DO YOU WANT ME TO START?
WHERE'S MY SHIRT?
DIXON
no.
7
MRS BROOKING! WHERE'S MY SHIRT? MY LUCKY SHIRT!
IT'S STILL IN THE WASH, KYLE.
BUT YOU *KNOW* I ALWAYS WEAR IT SATURDAY NIGHT! IT'S MY *LUCKY* SHIRT!
WHY DON'T YOU STAY IN FOR ONCE? YOU KNOW THE MANAGER ISN'T HAPPY ABOUT YOU GOING OUT DRINKING TO ALL HOURS.
THE *MANAGER?* YOU *STUPID* WOMAN, WHO GIVES A FLYING *FIG* ABOUT THE MANAGER?
HOW CAN YOU *SPEAK* TO ME LIKE THAT, KYLE DIXON!
I JUST OPEN MY MOUTH AND THE WORDS COME OUT! *STUPID--WOMAN--* THERE! I SAID IT AGAIN!
I'M GOING TO COMPLAIN TO THE CLUB ABOUT YOU.
DON'T WASTE YOUR BREATH. THE CLUB HAS ALREADY DISPENSED WITH MY SERVICES.


THAT NIGHT KYLE CUTS LOOSE--
THIS COULD BE YOUR LUCKY NIGHT, LADIES.
WHY, ARE YOU LEAVING?
VERY FUNNY. VERY FUNNY. I CAN AP...APPRESHIATE A GIRL WITH A SENSE OF HUMOUR.
ANYONE THAT WENT OUT WITH YOU WOULD NEED ONE.
YOU'RE THAT FOOTBALLER, AREN'T YOU? KYLE DIXON.
THATSH THE NAME...AND FAME'S THE GAME. SO HOW ABOUT WE THREE RETURN TO MY PLACE FOR A LITTLE STAR-STUDDED ACTION?
HOW ABOUT YOU JUST GET LOST?
COME ON, DARLING, YOU KNOW YOU WANT IT.
THIS GUY BOTHERING YOU, EILEEN?
IT'S KYLE DIXON. HE'S DRUNK.
Oh, YEAH, DIXON, I HEARD. GOT SENT OFF TODAY, PLAYED LIKE A *TOOL*--AS USUAL. REDS LOST 3-0.
NOT MY FAULT.
WHY DON'T YOU JUST DRIBBLE OFF, DIXON? YOU SMELL OF SICK.
WHO DO YOU THINK YOU'RE *ORDERING ABOUT?*
SKASH!!


GIVE ME SOME ORDERS NOW, FACE! COME ON!
STOP IT! STOP IT!
PUT IT DOWN, KYLE, OR I'LL CALL THE COPS!
HELL WITH THE COPS.
YOU'VE HAD TOO MUCH TO DRINK! YOU'RE ACTING LIKE A FOOL! PUT IT DOWN! PUT IT DOWN AND GO HOME!
PRICE
KTISH
AW, THE HELL--!
WHERE'S MY KEYS?
CARDS
PIZZA
BOOM BOX
SKREEEEEEEE


N1 KYLE
HERE PUSSY, PUSSY, PUSSY!
VRMMMMMMM
SKERANGGG
N1 KYLE
KL53ZT
HIGHERWOOD ONLY


BLOODY REDS! BLOODY McCANN! WHAT DO *THEY* KNOW--?
POXY LITTLE DUMP! RADFORD REDS--
WITHOUT *ME* YOU'RE NOTHING! *NOTHING!* JUST A BUNCH OF CLOGGERS! *I'M* THE CLASS! *I'M* THE ONE!
YOU SHOULD GET DOWN ON YOUR *KNEES* AND *THANK* ME FOR STRAPPING ON MY BOOTS! WELL, I'LL SHOW YOU! I'LL SHOW YOU!
Huh?


I GOTTA BE SEEIN' THINGS--
IT'S THE DRINK... GOTTA LAY OFF...
HOLY...
IT CAN'T...
JEEZ!


NO WAY, MAN! NO WAY!
UNH!
I'M TRAPPED!
P-P-PLEASE, DON'T HURT ME--
I'M FAMOUS! IF YOU HURT ME IT'LL RAISE A STINK! TH-THINK ABOUT THAT!
OBVIOUSLY A SOPHISTICATED LANGUAGE. BY THAT AND HIS APPAREL I KNOW HIM TO BE OF THIS PLANET'S DOMINANT SPECIES-- SUITABLE FOR MY PURPOSE.

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SO... I AM ROK OF THE REDS.
RADFORD REDS
NEXT: ALIEN ON THE WING!

Part One

Happy Times and Places
40 YEARS of DOCTOR WHO
Comic Strip in Doctor Who Weekly and Doctor Who Magazine





Artwork: Mike Collins / David A Roach

40 Years of the Doctor Who Comic strip in Doctor Who Weekly and Doctor Who Magazine

2004 was a big year for Doctor Who. Eight years after the 1996 television movie starring Paul McGann and 15 years after the last regular series with Sylvester McCoy, the BBC announced that the programme would be returning. Russell T Davies, a hugely successful writer who had enjoyed success with programmes such as Channel 4's Queer as Folk, was to be Doctor Who's new 'showrunner'. The new Doctor, the ninth incarnation of the famous Time Lord, was Christopher Eccleston, an actor who had worked with Davies on the ITV drama The Second Coming. A new golden era of Doctor Who was about to begin.

Of course, the Doctor Who comic strip had never gone away. Doctor Who Magazine had gone from strength to strength despite the absence of the TV show. But change was afoot and when Eccleston debuted on television in the spring of 2005, it was inevitable that this new version of the Doctor would also take the lead in the comic strip as well.

The Ninth Doctor's tenure on television was short - just one season. But it re-established Doctor Who in the public consciousness. Similarly, the new Doctor's era in the DWM comic strip was also short - just four stories. The first story, 'The Love Invasion' by Gareth Roberts and Clayton Hickman, ran from April to June 2005. It was followed by 'Art Attack', 'The Cruel Sea' and 'A Groatsworth of Wit' which concluded in January 2006. The Doctor's television companion Rose Tyler (played by Billie Piper) accompanied the Doctor in each of these comic strip adventures.

Mike Collins drew the pencils for 'The Love Invasion' and would also go on to draw the debuts of Doctors Ten and Eleven. Were there any specific





Artwork: John Ross

requirements for an opening story - approvals needed by the BBC or the actors?'Absolutely,' recalls Mike. 'When the show returned, the contract situation had changed and actors now had likeness rights - not a bad thing, really. It did mean that every few years I had to essentially reapply for my job by creating model sheets for new Doctors and companions. It's not a bad thing to have to do, as it gets you into the feel of the character before drawing the strip.'

Mike is DWM's most prolific penciller. How does he think the strip has changed over the years? 'I was lucky as the strip was established very early as having it's own voice by Pat (Mills) and John (Wagner), then Steve Moore, then Steve Parkhouse. As a writer you have some mighty shoulders to stand on there. It is a quintessentially British comic strip moulded by the folks who brought us Judge Dredd, Nemesis the Warlock, Laser Eraser and Pressbutton and Captain Britain/Black Knight. They gave it that wonderful grounded but amused feel that echoed the TV show while existing as its own thing.'

'It really wasn't until the show came back,' adds Mike, 'that the BBC had a more hands-on approach to the stories and structure. The first few comic strips were structured like TV episodes - until the sheer brilliant madness of Rob Sherman's 'The Cruel Sea'. The BBC still oversees stories but generally the only time things get rejected is if they clash with upcoming episodes. Artwise? When Dave Gibbons, Mick McMahon, Steve Dillon and John Ridgway are the guys before you, you have to up your game!'

Eccleston's successor was Scottish actor David Tennant whose most notable role had been the lead in another Russell T Davies series, Casanova. Tennant brought a youthful energy to the role and arguably went on to be the most popular Doctor of the 21st century incarnation of the show. The Sontarans featured in the first Tenth Doctor strip, 'The Betrothal of Sontar' in which Rose befriended Lerax, a Sontaran with a conscience. This was followed by 'The Lodger', a one part story which would later form the basis of the Matt Smith television episode of the same name. Other highlights included 'The Stockbridge Child' in 2009 in which the Doctor once again met his old friend Maxwell Edison.

As DWM editor from 2007 to 2017, Tom Spilisbury oversaw much of the Tenth Doctor's era. Did he think it was important for the strip to emulate the style of the TV show or go off in its own direction? 'Oh, we absolutely wanted to have our cake and eat it,' recalls Tom. 'We always wanted to be more than just a 'TV tie-in', and tell stories that MATTERED. That's why I was keen to introduce a companion of our own (Majenta), as we could do things with her that wouldn't be possible with a TV companion. With Rose or Martha or Donna, you knew they could never be in real danger, or that anything could ever truly change for them, as anything important had to happen to them on TV, not the strip. So I wanted us to develop and expand on our own mythology, as well as fitting in with whatever was being done on TV.'

In 2010, Matt Smith debuted as the Eleventh Doctor. Aged 26, he was the youngest actor to play the role. The Eleventh Doctor's first DWM comic strip outing was 'Supernature' from May to July 2010, which featured the Doctor and his companion Amy Pond arriving on a prison colony and encountering a deadly plague that transformed prisoners into beasts. This Doctor went on to encounter a diverse range of characters and monsters including the Axons, UNIT and even the author CS Lewis! He bowed out in 'The Blood of Azrael' in May 2014 which Mike Collins recalls was 'a vast, sprawling SF epic with some fabulous scenes.'

Whereas Matt Smith had been the youngest Doctor, his successor Peter Capaldi was 55 when he inherited the role, the same age that the original Doctor William Hartnell had been when the series had begun in 1963. Capaldi commenced his comic strip reign with 'The Eye of Torment' in 2014.

A highpoint of the Twelfth Doctor's era was 2015's 'The Highgate Horror', an atmospheric vampire tale set in the 1970s. I asked writer Mark Wright if he had any particular influences for this story. Is he a fan of horror movies for example? 'Funnily, horror is not my go-to genre,' Mark explains, 'but there's something about Doctor Who that suits its trappings. For 'Highgate', I was given the location as part of the brief (and even went on a location recce to the

cemetery for a tour of both sides of the grounds, which was incredibly useful). There was a totally different first pass of an outline surrounding a tour guide in the midst of grief over the loss of a parent but then we decided to go full pelt on the 70s horror and picked up the urban myth of the Highgate Vampire, which is a fascinating tale. Things like Dracula AD 1972 really played into the mix, and if we'd had more space, I'd have taken the story out of the cemetery and out into London of that period.'

'The Highgate Horror' introduced Jess Collins, an art history student who would go on to appear in several subsequent adventures . 'Jess was a complete fluke,' says Mark,' intended as a one-off supporting character, so she was effectively my creation, with some input from Scott Gray. Then as plans formed in relation to the TV series, Scott found he needed a comic-strip only companion to cover the gap from Clara to Bill, but as we'd only need them for 11 issues or so, it was decided to strand the Doctor on Earth with Jess. It was nice that Scott had seen something in the character that he thought would make a good companion. And a lot of things slotted together there - her Afro-Carribbean background gave us a family and the Brixton setting, the early 70s time period gave us the opening of the Victoria Line extension to Brixton and the in for 'The Pestilent Heart', the opening story of the earthbound run. I'm very fond of the Collins family, and would love to revisit them one day.'



Artwork:
Mike Collins /
David A Roach

2016's 'Witch Hunt' by Jacqueline Rayner was another popular Twelfth Doctor strip which explored similarly sinister subject matter to the later televised adventure 'The Witchfinders'. Were there are specific influences for this story? 'I loved writing it,' Jac recalls. 'My main influence goes right back to seeing a woodcut of witches in the Children's Britannica at an early age and discovering I came from witch country! Not Pendle as in the series, but Essex - Chelmsford, where I was born, held some of the biggest witch trials; the very first execution took place there. Matthew Hopkins crops up a lot if you read about the Essex witches - the castle where Clara is imprisoned is meant to be Colchester castle, where Hopkins interrogated many poor women.'

Having written Who for audio, prose and comics, does Jac think that Doctor Who differs depending on the medium it's told in, or is a good Doctor Who story a good Doctor Who story regardless of the medium? 'I think that the essence of a good Doctor Who story is always the same, but the way you tell something is dependent on the medium. From the kernel of an idea, you take it in the relevant direction to serve the chosen media. At one point I'd thought of doing a prose story about the Essex witches,





but coming to it as a comic strip took the story another way. There's an amazing page of Clara in the darkness of the castle cell - it would take pages of prose to get across how she's feeling, but thanks to Martin Geraghty, David Roach and James Offredi, there it was at a glance.'

Tom Spilsbury's tenure as DWM editor came to a close during the Twelfth Doctor's era. How would he say the strip had evolved during his time on the magazine? 'I don't know if the strip evolved as such, but the big innovation was that we started doing arcs that were specifically designed to run in graphic novels - runs of 18 to 20 issues. So we could plan out bigger storylines that would work even better when you had the compilation.'

In 2017, incoming Doctor Who showrunner Chris Chibnall cast Yorkshire-born Jodie Whittaker as the first female Doctor. Accompanied by her TV companions Graham, Ryan and Yaz, the new incarnation has been as dynamic on the printed page as she is on the screen. Scott Gray has written all of the new Doctor's DWM strips so far, starting with 'The Warmonger' in 2018. Is there a Thirteenth Doctor strip he's particularly proud of? 'I'm probably proudest of 'The Power of the Mobox', because it didn't kill me! It's the first multi-parter I've written and drawn. It was a lot of work, but I loved every second of it..'

How does Scott approach the strip? 'I've always tried to reflect the broad tone of each TV era in the strip, and that's obviously changed over the years as different actors and showrunners have





Artwork: John Ross

"Accompanied by her TV companions Graham, Ryan and Yaz, the new incarnation has been as dynamic on the printed page as she is on the screen"

come and gone in the series. The strip's probably altered less than you might imagine – I think it's very much the TV show as seen through a DWM prism, with the comic strip's universe informing it'.

So, looking back, why has the DWM strip been so successful for 40 years?

'It's managed to take a successful concept in one medium and make it work perfectly in a wholly different one,' reflects Mike. 'It started brilliantly with 'Iron Legion' and we always try to hit that initial benchmark. In the comics we can achieve things they can't afford to do on TV and yet we're aware we have to stay true to the concept.'

'Various things', says Tom. 'It helps that it's based on the best TV show ever, of course. But importantly, it's always strived to be as good - or better - than the show itself. I can't stress how much Scott Gray has to take the credit for guiding the development to the strip for decades. But it's also the most brilliant team of artists and writers. The key thing, that Scott always stressed, was how we had an 'unlimited budget'. While the TV show would have to build an expensive set, we just had to draw it! And pretty much anything could be realised in artwork form.'

According to Jac: 'The most obvious answer is because it's so good - but then many good comic strips have fallen by the wayside. It would have been an easy decision to cut it or shorten it, comics are so expensive, but every single editor has championed that strip and allowed it to flourish. It's also been allowed to forge ahead, not follow the TV series slavishly - or be in thrall to its own history. It's not TV Doctor Who in comic form, it's 'The Star Beast', it's 'Voyager', it's' Ground Zero', it's' Oblivion'. Honestly, I'm still a bit overwhelmed that I was allowed to be part of something like that. '

Doctor Who comics historian Paul Scoones has his own views on how the strip has evolved over four decades. 'I think there have been three particularly important moments in the evolution of the strip', explains Paul. 'The first comes in 1980 with the move to longer parts when the Weekly went Monthly. With more pages to play with, the writers and artists became more experimental. Secondly, the cancellation of Doctor Who freed up the comic to develop its own mythology and direction without having to accommodate what was happening on screen. Thirdly, the comic strip benefitted from the introduction of colour in 2001, mid-way through the run of Eighth Doctor comics. As wonderful as the black and white strips are, the introduction of colour brought a whole other dimension to the strip.'

As Doctor Who Magazine enters its fifth decade, the comic strip has never looked more confident and with a winning team of writers and artists and a superb Doctor, the future looks bright indeed.

With thanks to Mike Collins, Scott Gray, Marcus Hearn, Tom Spilsbury, Jacqueline Rayner, Paul Scoones, Peter Ware and Mark Wright. Doctor Who continues every four weeks in Doctor Who Magazine from Panini.

Artwork © Doctor Who Magazine/Panini.

In part two, we take a look at the first Doctors

Author: Ian Wheeler | **Twitter:** @ianwheeler_who

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COMIC SCENE REVIEW OF THE YEAR



The end of the year... which means it's not only time for both the inaugural ComicScene awards but also our overview of all that's been going on in comics this year.

Well, not quite true, we could have done a full run-down of everything but that would have been a lot, lot longer. Instead, what you get is my overview of the world of comics 2019, by no means definitive and all filtered through this writer's personal viewpoint. It's genuinely been rather a damn fine year in comics land and I can only apologise to those whose names I simply had to cut out in getting this down to something that fit the space!

Now, without further ado... the ComicScene review of the comics year 2019...

The view from the good ol' U.S. of A. - Comic Shops do one thing, readership does another?

Let's begin with the US scene, still the dominant force in comic shops both here and across the pond. But there's more to comics nowadays than comic shops, something I already covered last month with my article, Children's comics and comic shops… Why the comic shops are failing (CS Vol2 Issue 10).

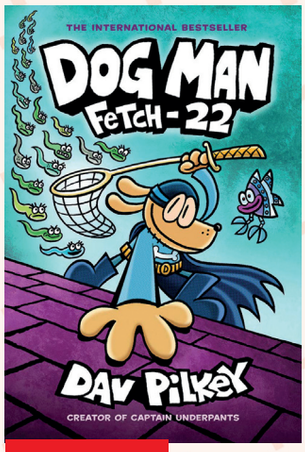
My basic issue is two-fold, first there's no system in place for recording actual sales to customers from comic shops. Those Diamond sales figures (or rather sales estimates based on a ranking system) are for sales to shops, which includes any unsold, non-returnable product, unlike Bookscan figures from bookstores which record actual customer sales. Secondly, the sales to comic shops increasingly fail to reflect the explosion in sales, year after year, of children's and Young Adult graphic novels.

So yet again, the biggest sellers of 2018 in bookstores (the last Bookscan figures available) weren't The Walking Dead, Spider-Man, or Batman, but instead come from just two creators; Raina Telgemeier and Dav Pilkey. Tellingly, the best-selling graphic novel to comic shops for 2018 was Infinity War, no doubt buoyed up by the success of Avengers: Endgame. But on the booksellers charts, tracking actual sales to customers, Infinity War placed 29th with 54,000 sales, whereas Pilkey took slots 1-6 (his number one book sold 716,647) and Telgemeier slots 7-9 (her number seven book sold 174,550) in a year where she had no new books out at all.

Come the end of 2019, both Pilkey and Telgemeier will undoubtedly dominate sales charts in bookstores far and wide, with Telgemeier's Guts, and Pilkey's latest Dog Man graphic novel currently working their ways through a 1m and 3m print-run respectively. Both of which books have already topped the New York Times bestseller lists for books (yes, books – Stephen King had to settle for second behind Guts).



Raina Telgemeier's
Gaphic Novels



Dav Pilkey's
Dogman

So… tell me again how the superheroes are the future of comics. Oh, what they would give for even a tiny fraction of the print runs and sales of the children and young adults' graphic novel market

Meanwhile, in the direct sales market of comic shops, publishers have made 2019 a good year with a great deal of wonderful comics, albeit one where everyone and their dog seems to be publishing multiple variant covers. Yes, we get some lovely covers, but it's just overkill and another artificial way to prop up sales numbers without actually expanding the readership.

Marvel Comics – Events dominate but the best comes from left-field…

Marvel Comics' year was once more one of big events and reboots (but then again, isn't it always?) The biggest news was the 80th anniversary of this publisher, celebrated with the publication of Marvel Comics 1000, where 80 different creative teams (and seemingly as many covers) chronicled the 80 years of Marvel. And all in all, it wasn't too bad.

Of the events, War of the Realms, spearheaded by Jason Aaron, was a fun thing. But the event of the year, enjoyed by new and old fans alike, has to be the whole House of X/Powers of X series, where writer Jonathan Hickman crafted something that successfully reinvented & reinvigorated the whole X-Men line for the coming reboot. And given what we've seen of that reboot, with X-Men, Marauders, Excalibur et al, things are looking promising there for the first time in a long time.

However, if I had to pick out just two greats from Marvel this year, hopefully both of which will feature in the ComicScene awards, they both sit at the outskirts of books not too bogged down by continuity. In Immortal Hulk, Al Ewing & Joe Bennett have made a Hulk that's every bit the terrifying monster he should be, with inventive storylines giving us a modern Hulk with a difference. Second pick is as far from the horrors of the Hulk as you could get, The Unstoppable Wasp by Jeremy Whitley, Gurihiru & Firmansyah. Sadly cancelled, the series gave us a young, funky, and downright fun series full of playfulness, glorious gags, yet still managing to explore complex mental health issues.

DC Comics – Bendis, Batman, Big Green Boy-Scout, and bye-bye Vertigo…

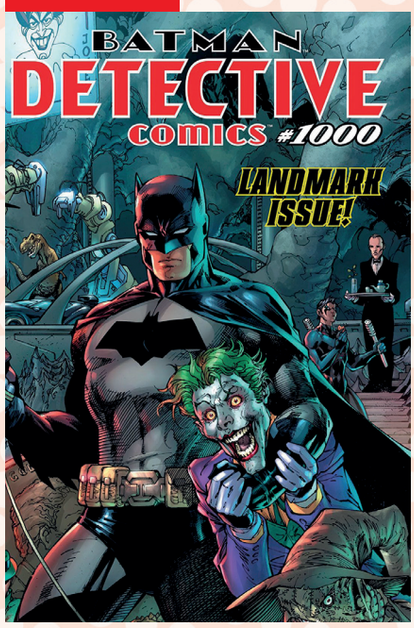
As far as DC Comics were concerned, we had the ongoing Bendis-isation of the Superman titles going on, with Brian Michael Bendis continuing both his Superman takeover and his new Wonder Comics imprint, where Naomi continues to be the stand-out title, as well as spearheading the return of the Legion of Superheroes.

Batman turned 80 this year (something ComicScene covered in depth), with three great titles in amongst the Bat-avalanche; Detective Comics 1000, Scott Snyder and

House of X
Marvel



Detective 1000
DC



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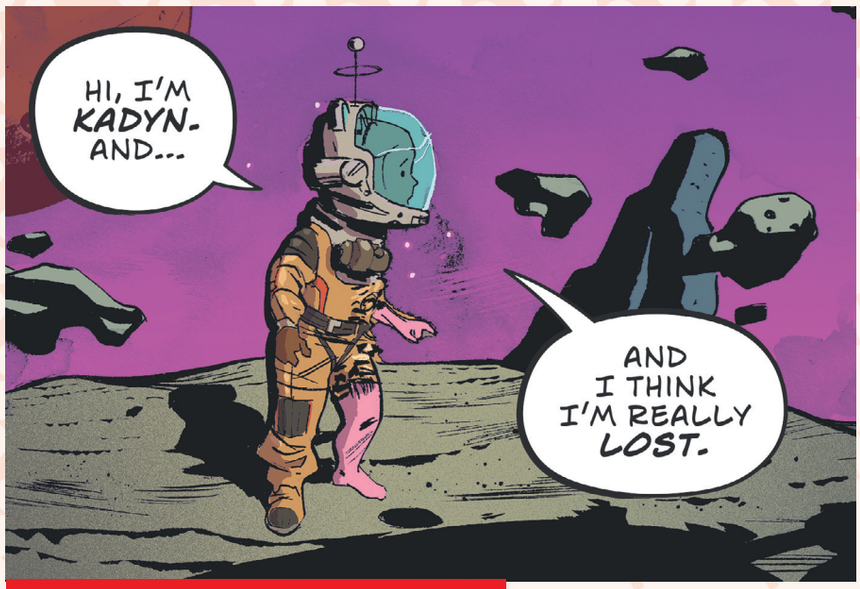
Green Lantern
DC



> "...It's been **Image** that's really stood out for me as **the main driver** of wonderfully diverse comics

Jock's horrifying Batman Who Laughs, as well as The Batman's Grave by Warren Ellis, reuniting with his Authority artist, Bryan Hitch, on what Ellis described as his 'Proper big Batman story'. But again, cutting the list down to two titles I particularly loved, I have to pick Ellis' reboot of the entire Wildstorm Universe heroes in The Wild Storm with Jon Davis-Hunt which reached its conclusion this year. And then there was Grant Morrison and Liam Sharp doing amazing things on Green Lantern, where the big green boy scout got back to his very best.

But things weren't all good at DC this year. First there was the terribly sad loss of the Vertigo imprint, whose importance to the shape of modern comics should never be forgotten. The line that brought us Sandman, Preacher, 100 Bullets, Y The Last Man and so much more is no more and the various super-ish characters are gradually finding their way into the DC Universe. And that brings us, in round-a-bout fashion, to DC's latest two-fingers to Alan Moore with the utter pointlessness and terminal lateness that is The Doomsday Clock, bringing Moore and Dave Gibbons' Watchmen characters into the DC Universe proper.



Sea of Stars
Jason Aaron, Dennis Hallum, and Stephen Green

Image Comics... Who thought all those years ago that they'd be the home of such diversity?

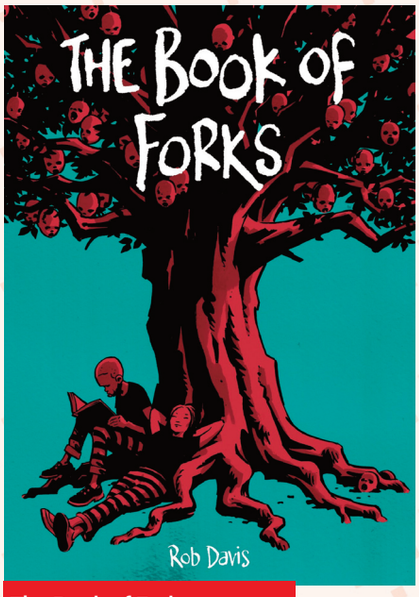
Outside the big two, it's been Image that's really stood out for me as the main driver of wonderfully diverse comics. Of course, the big, big news was the surprise end of The Walking Dead and the sudden yet fitting way Robert Kirkman and Charlie Adlard decided to draw things to a close there. But Image highlights for me include the delightful space adventure Sea of Stars from Jason Aaron, Dennis Hallum, and Stephen Green and Skyward by Joe Henderson and Lee Garbett, a wonderfully positive series based on the weird science around gravity turning off. However, my favourite short comic of the year had to be the wonderful 2-part fantasy of The White Trees from Chip Zdarsky and Kris Anka, showing a complete mastery of economical storytelling, of show don't tell, and letting the art carry the story.



The White Trees
Chip Zdarsky and Kris Anka



Mooncakes
Suzanne Walker & Wendy Xu



The Book of Forks
Rob Davis



Brink
Dan Abnett and INJ Culbard

Everything else... Gillen's great triple, Berger Books' Everything, Lion Forge championing LGBTQ+ ... it's strength in depth all over...

Then there's the multi-talented joy that is Kieron Gillen, responsible for at least three of the best comic series of 2019; Die and The Wicked & The Divine from Image and Peter Cannon: Thunderbolt from Dynamite. In Die, Gillen and artist Stephanie Hans manage to do epic fantasy from the simple concept of 'what-if the old D&D cartoon actually happened in real life?'. The finale of WicDiv, with co-creator Jamie McKelvie, was all the epic pop meets myth meets belief meets fame thing all us fans wanted it to be. And finally, Thunderbolt gave us a real meta-fictional look at comics, through the lens of Watchmen. Three out of three for Gillen and more to come in 2020.

There's simply not the space to cover everything that was so good this year, with brilliance coming at us from all sides from so many publishers. There was Buffy returning from Boom!, the continued reinvention of Archie Comics, Jeff Lemire's Black Hammer superhero universe with a difference, and so much more from a wide and diverse array of publishers such as Fantagraphics, Dynamite, First Second, Oni, and so many more. But special mention has to go to Lion Forge, as they've really carved out a name for themselves, publishing a truly diverse range of books with a particular emphasis on LGBTQ+ positive works, with highlights being Mooncakes by Suzanne Walker & Wendy Xu and Gender Queer by Maia & Phoebe Kobabe.

Take me back to dear old Blighty - the Brit Comics year...

Now, onto Brit comics... although that's a difficult one anyway, as so many of the great comic creators from Britain are doing wonderful things in the US. Take John Allison, a long-time staple of both the thriving Brit-scene and webcomics, he had a great year in US comics, with the end of the long-running Giant Days at Boom! and the start of his Dark Horse series, Steeple. Or INJ Culbard, brilliant artist on so many great Brit strips and books, who's responsible for the best title to come out of the Berger Books imprint at Dark Horse; Everything (written by Christopher Cantwell).

In terms of the wealth of wonderful comics coming out of the UK, it continues to be such a great time. And of course, if you're reading ComicScene you'll be well aware of the real breadth and depth of quality material the UK has to offer.

Publishers such as Titan, Avery Hill, Jonathan Cape, and SelfMadeHero pushed out a really diverse lineup of comics and graphic novels, including highlights (for me) of Ryuko by Eldo Yoshimizu, two volumes of really intense Manga crime action from Titan, Bryan & Mary Talbot's latest book, Rain, and Walking Distance by Lizzy Stewart, a beautiful reflection on self from Avery Hill. But as good as they were, I'm convinced that nothing will beat the brilliance of Rob Davis' final part of his Motherless Oven trilogy, The Book of Forks - my choice for graphic novel of the year.

Still the best provider of Thrill-Power in the Galaxy - 2000 AD's incredible 2019

2000 AD, along with The Treasury of British Comics, had a stellar year, with the Treasury now a massive repository of Brit comics from the last 100+ years. All of this meant that we not only got a weekly dose of 2000 AD and a monthly hit of the Judge Dredd Megazine, but also got so many specials and graphic novel collections from 2000 AD and The Treasury, bringing us reprint collections of past strips and new reinventions of classic characters.

In 2000 AD, we saw numerous reminders of why the comic is still the very best, with strips such as Dan Abnett and INJ

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Culbard's Brink showing us how damn fabulous the comic could be. And late in the year, I fell in love with SK Moore's artwork on the new series of the Pat Mills written Defoe, showing me once more that there's always a new favourite artist waiting in the wings. But, if you had to tie me down to the best thing all year, it would have to be the collection of Rob Williams and Henry Flint's Judge Dredd: The Small House, possibly the best Dredd since The Apocalypse War.

It was also, thanks to Rebellion and the Treasury, a year of bringing things back. Whether this was the continued reprinting of long lost things such as Leopard of Lime Street, Wildcat, or Leo Baxendale's Sweeny Toddler, much missed and much beloved, or the all-new material based on old works, they had a stellar year. We had more Scream & Misty specials and another Vigilant Special, reinventing those classic Brit supertypes.

Brit Comics for kids - building the future readership

Rebellion also had a great year in terms of reaching out to new readers through their younger titles, with both the Cor! & Buster Special and Tammy & Jinty Special bringing back so many wonderful strips, reimagined for a new audience. Whether it was new Bella at the Bar, Faceache, Maisie's Magic Eye, Kid Kong, or many more, these comics gave us a glimpse of a possible future of kids' comics and girls' comics – at last!

And then there was Roy. Him of that there Melchester Rovers. Yes, we had some classic collections, as the Treasury also brought out books featuring best of the 50s and 60s, along with a great looking 65th anniversary collection. But the main thrust comes from the rebirth of Roy Of The Rovers that began in 2018, with a combination of novels from Tom Palmer, along with illustrations from Lisa Henke, and graphic novels from Rob Williams and Ben Willsher, all of them telling the tale of a brand new Roy as he begins his footballing career. The reinvention continued in 2019, with two books and two graphic novels finishing off season one and a new book for Sept 2019 with Tom Palmer joined by Rok of the Reds artist Dan Cornwell on illustrations, and Lisa Henke transferring to art duties on the Rob Williams written GNs. The future of Roy seems absolutely safe in all of their hands.

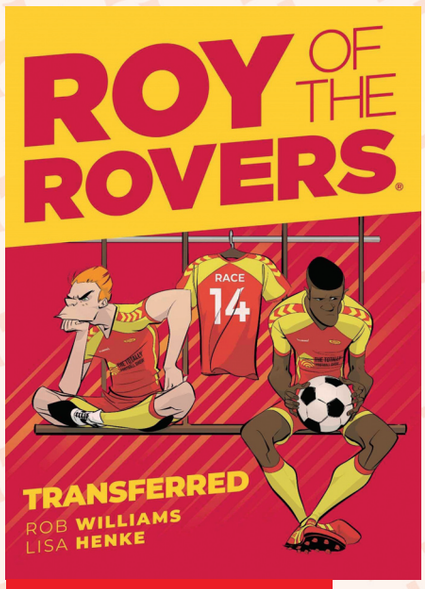
> "...**Beano** hitting a fabulous **4000th issue** in August.

And then there's the ongoing adventures of Rocky of the Rovers, Roy's younger sister, and according to all concerned the best footballer in the Race family. With the popularity of women's football increasing by leaps and bounds, Rocky's appearances in the novels and graphic novels, alongside her own strip in the Tammy & Jinty Special, was a real highlight. And she's a character we're going to see a lot more of in the future.

Elsewhere, the children's comic scene of UK publishing, although small, had a grand year, very much a great anniversary year, what with the Beano hitting a fabulous 4000th issue in August and the Phoenix Comic still going strong at the much more modest 400th issue this year as well. Sales of the Phoenix are a little tricky to establish, but the Beano is looking strong, with sales hitting the 40,000+ point and building year on year. It's difficult to see kids' comics sometimes, as most of the titles on the supermarket shelves are simply exercises in selling plastic tat on the front covers, so titles such as Beano and Phoenix deserve our full support as proper, wonderful comics.



Cor! & Buster
Rebellion



Roy of the Rovers
Rob Williams and Lisa Henke



The Beano
DC Thomson



Rok the God
Redrok Comics



The Phoenix
Issue 400

The continued success of these comics for younger readers is something we should all be supporting, as it's something that ensures a thriving future for the medium we love. And that's just why ComicScene has its very own all-ages pull-out comic, Corker, something we want you to get behind and pass on to those who we're sure would love comics when they get hold of them.

Commando – Still delivering all-out action, still all too often overlooked!

One long-standing comic that is all too often overlooked is the ever-excellent Commando, still one of the longest running titles in the UK, getting near the 5300 issue mark very soon. It delivers the action every issue, with a remarkably wide-range of subjects within its combat remit. Additionally, this year we saw more of a new graphic novel series from Commando with the return of the much missed Ramsey's Raiders.

Beyond the big boys… The thriving UK comics' scene on a smaller scale

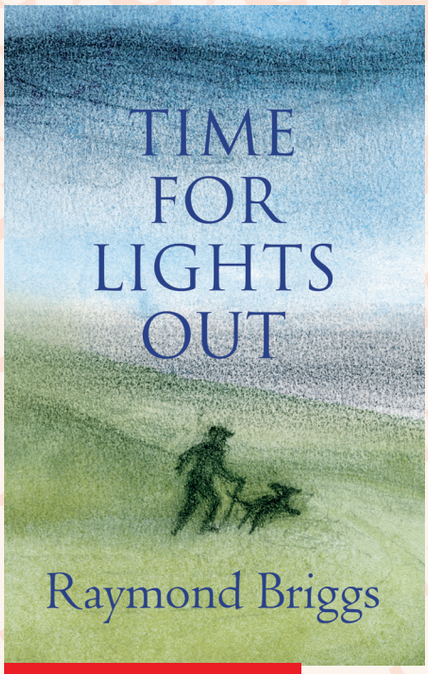
But the UK scene is far more than just a handful of big publishers, with a vibrant, exciting scene fuelled by so many small publishers and self-published works, where you'll find something for everyone, no matter what your tastes. It might be creators just putting out books for conventions and online, it might be creators using funding platforms, such as Kickstarter, but whatever it is, there's a wealth of brilliant talent in the UK scene.

For just a few examples, you need look no further than books such as the alien warrior meets Premier League football adventures of Rok The God by John Wagner, Alan Grant & Dan Cornwell (which we love here at ComicScene – in fact you'll find the serialization of its predecessor Rok of the Reds right here in this issue); or Hitsville UK by John Riordan & Dan Cox, a perfect pop hit of music and madness; Department of the Peculiar by Rol Hirst & Rob Wells, all X-Files meets Brit-comedy superheroics. Jules Scheele does some incredible work, whether it's her self-published Sleepless or forthcoming (just missing 2019) Gender with Meg-John Barker, then there's Rachael Smith's powerful and inspiring works, including the magnificent Stand In Your Power, or long-time comics maker Lew Stringer, usually to be found in Beano and elsewhere but also the maker of some excellent self-published books including Combat Colin, and the weird and wonderful delights of both Douglas Noble and Sean Azzopardi, whether working alone or together on books such as Black Leather. And there are so many more I could easily mention, if only I had space.

And we cover all of it here at ComicScene with our Indie section, but it's also worth checking out the Broken Frontier and Down The Tubes websites for more, or my own Best Of British section over at the US site Comicon.

Farewells and those we lost in 2019

In terms of goodbyes, long-time Brit publisher Knockabout brought us a special moment this year, as we said what we think is the final goodbye to both Alan Moore and Kevin O'Neill with both extraordinary gentlemen announcing their retirements from comics with the final



Time for Lights Out
Raymond Briggs final book

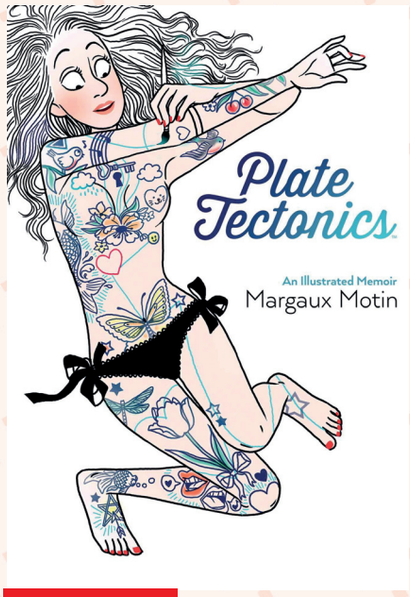


Plate Tectonics
Margaux Motin

collection of their League of Extraordinary Gentlemen, Tempest coming late in the year. It's been a wonderful ride for them both and we hope their retirements are short-lived.

Also saying his farewell in 2019 is the genius that is Raymond Briggs, whose final book Time For Lights Out, saw the legendary cartoonist giving us one last look at why he's one of the best. More illustrated prose than comics certainly, but this feels like a goodbye, as Briggs ruminates on life, love, and death in melancholy yet typically spiky fashion. If it's his last work, then it's a fitting end to a magnificent career.

> "2019 was also the usual packed year for comic cons over here in the UK

Finally, a moment to reflect on those we've lost this year in UK comics. The death of 2000AD stalwart Ron Smith (January, aged 90) left the UK comics scene all the poorer as did the deaths of Malky McCormick (April, aged 76), Tommy Donbavand (May, aged 51), and Nigel Dobbyn (August, aged 56).

Britain – probably the best comic conventions in the world!

2019 was also the usual packed year for comic cons over here in the UK. I suspect I share with many of you a memory of a time where you had a choice of one con a year, UKCAC. Today it's almost unusual to have a weekend that doesn't have some comic event somewhere in the country, at least from Spring through the beginning of November.

To my mind, the key to deciding if a 'comic-con' is worth going to all depends on how easy it is to find the comic guests on the show's website. If all you can see at first glance is signing opportunities for 4th Stormtrooper to the left or random Cybermen, then best give it a miss and go for any number of great conventions who actually actively promote their comic guests! And in terms of the best of the best, I still believe you cannot get better than the Lakes International Comics Festival (October) and Thought Bubble Comic Festival (November), both of which are dedicated to comics and deliver a magnificent comic festival experience.

Further afield – the world of comics awaits you ...

One continuing problem with English-language comics is that it tends to ignore the incredible wealth of material from non-English speaking comic makers. Yes, Manga is a big, big thing, but even a casual look at the Manga titles on offer tells us the likes of Viz, Dark Horse, Titan, Yen Press et al are reprinting only a fraction of what's available.

The same is true of Euro comics. We have one excellent British publisher, Cinebook, dedicated to bringing the very best of Euro comics to us, including the likes of Lucky Luke, Valerian, Alone, amongst the 500+ books they've brought us already. We also have English-language reprintings of great Euro works coming from SelfMadeHero, Titan, Humanoids, Rebellion, and more.

But it just isn't enough, as for every Snowpiercer, Largo Winch, Spirou, and Operation Overlord that we can read there are hundreds of greats that we can't. But thank you to all those publishers who do make the effort to get these wonderful comics into our hands, all adding to the incredible diversity and scope of the comics world. Because the alternative is that I have to revisit my woeful O-level German and even worse French to experience the delights that await.

Having said that, one Euro comics creator I will spend many hours translating (badly) is Margaux Motin, whose only English-language book to date, But I Really Wanted To Be An Anthropologist (SelfMadeHero, 2012) will, at last be joined on my shelf in December when Archaia brings out Plate Tectonics, another book I see easily making my best of the year list.

2019 – It's Been A Fabulous Year! Join us in 2020 for continued coverage of all things comics in ComicScene!

Well, that was the year that was. As for next year? Who knows. But we can confidently predict that you'll be able to find all the best coverage of the comics' world in 2020 right here in every issue of ComicScene, as we continue to celebrate the past, present and future of comics.

Author: Richard Bruton | **Twitter:**@richardbruton

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COMICSCENE PRESENTS

CORKER!

All ages pull out comic Issue 2

5 NEW Comic strips inside

Gallant & Amos



SLASH MORON



MEGATOMIC BATTLE RABBIT



DEJA WHO?

CORKER! CONTENTS

We'd love to know what you think. Let us know your favourites and send us your drawings to comicsceneuk@gmail.com ...*Team Corker!*

Gallant & Amos
By Rob Barnes

Slash Moron
By Bambos Georgiou

Megatomic Battle Rabbit
By Stu Perrins & Israel Huretas

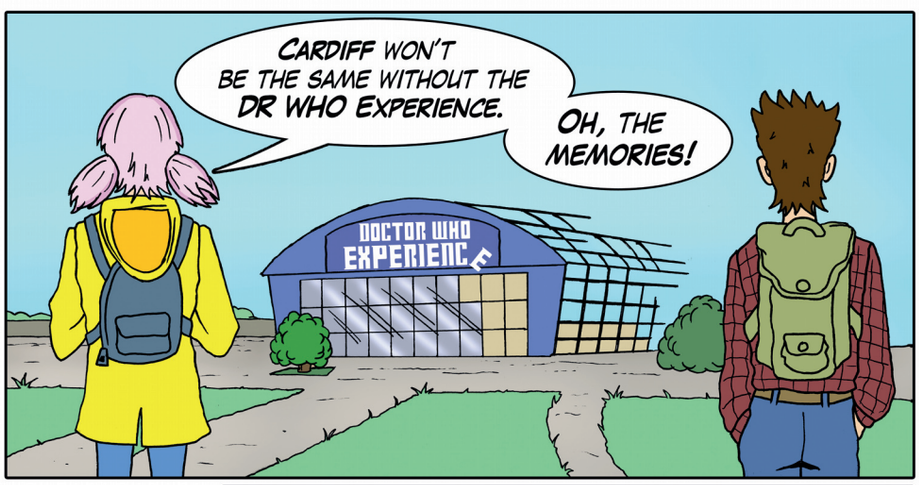


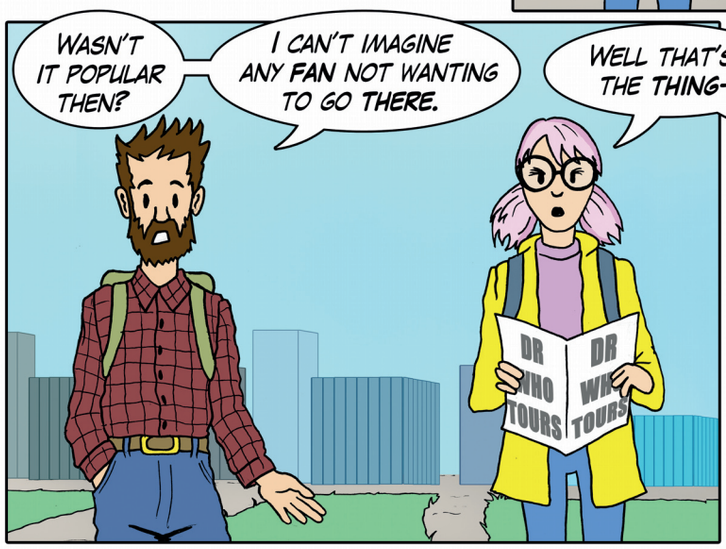


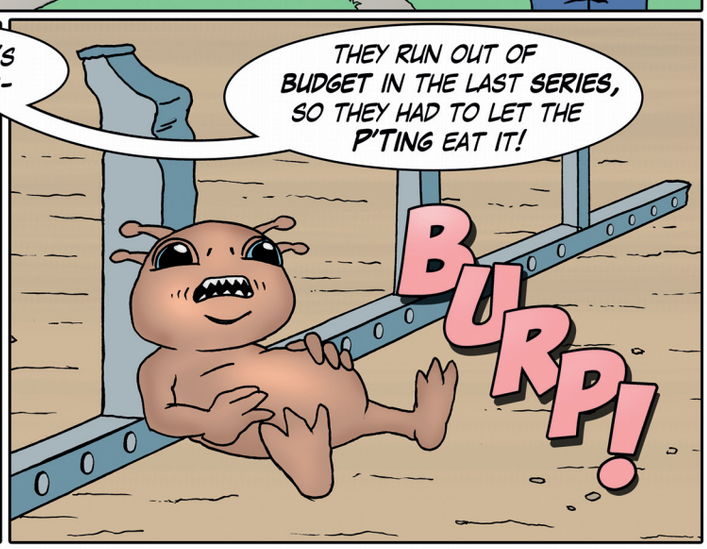


DEJA WHO? Fans

WRITTEN AND DRAWN BY JIM WILKINS







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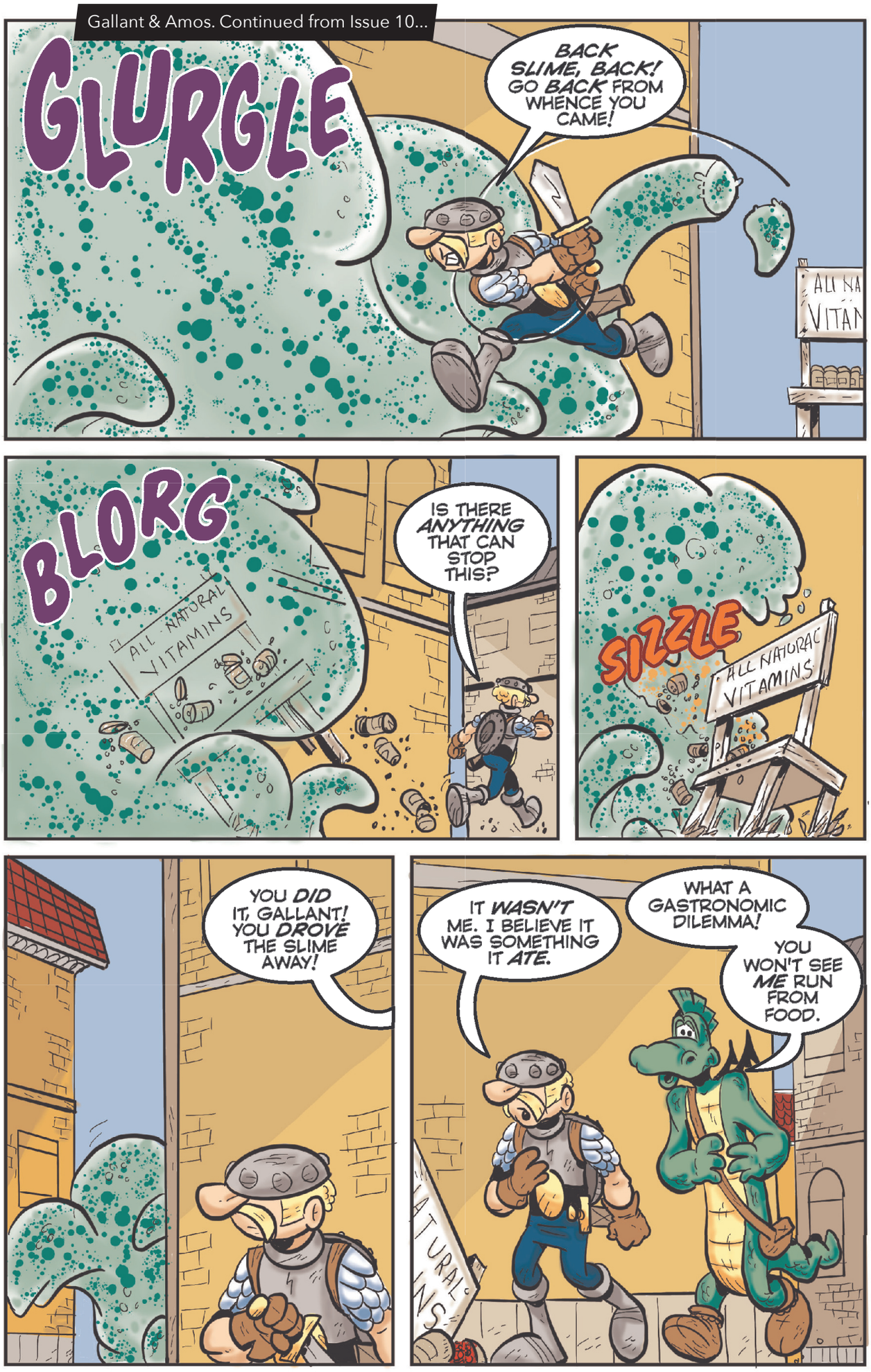
Gallant & Amos. Continued from Issue 10...




WE'RE LUCKY THAT IT DIDN'T LIKE THAT VITAMIN DISPLAY.
MY GUESS IS THAT A FOREIGN SUBSTANCE IS BEING DUMPED IN THE RIVER AND HAS CAUSED THIS ABERRATION.
HAZEL'S
WHEN WE ENTERED TOWN, I SAW SOME LIQUID COMING FROM A BUILDING OVER THERE.
UM. THAT'S MY HOUSE.
HA!
THEY SAW YOU DUMPING POTIONS, HAZEL!
THEN YOU KNOW WHO'S HOUSE IS DIRECTLY ACROSS THE RIVER?
OH. THAT'S MINE.
BUT MY POTIONS ARE USED TO ENHANCE MY BAKED GOODS.
MINE GOES INTO FIZZY DRINKS.
COMBINED, THOSE TONICS SEEM TO BE TRIGGERING BIZARRE EFFECTS. LIKE THE SLIME.
WE'LL NEED LOTS OF SAMPLES OF THE DRINKS AND CAKES TO EAT, UH, STUDY.


LET'S COLLECT ALL THE VITAMINS WE CAN FIND. IT DISSOLVES THE SLIME.
WE BETTER COLLECT SOME CAKES TOO.
WHEN YOU FIND THE SLIME, YOU'LL NEED SOMETHING TO COMBAT IT.
I'D LIKE TO BUILD SOMETHING TO CLEAN UP THIS MESS.
I'LL HELP, POLLY. WE CAN GET IT DONE QUICKER.
THAT'S SO SWEET!
SOMEONE HAS TO MAKE SURE THIS PROJECT GETS FINISHED.
SURE.
WE SHOULD FIND THE SLIME'S LAIR.
I CAN PROTECT THE PEOPLE AND BAKED GOODS.
AMOS!
SORRY LADIES, A HERO'S WORK IS NEVER DONE.
THANKS FOR THE SNACKS, TOO. A HERO WORKS BETTER WITH A FULL STOMACH.
HAZEL'S
KED GOODS


LATER. ACROSS TOWN.
THERE IT IS! THIS WAY, AMOS.
YOU EVER NOTICE HOW MUCH WE RUN?
I NEVER RAN THIS MUCH WHEN I LIVED AT THE WIZARD'S PLACE.
HEY! A FIZZY JUICE MACHINE!
JUICE
HMM. WHICH FLAVOR DO I GET?
THANKS. GOOD CHOICE.
TAP TAP
GALLANT!
HURRY UP, AMOS! WE CAN'T LET IT GET AWAY.
AS SOON AS I POWER UP WITH A FIZZY DRINK.
SIGH. RUNNING AGAIN.

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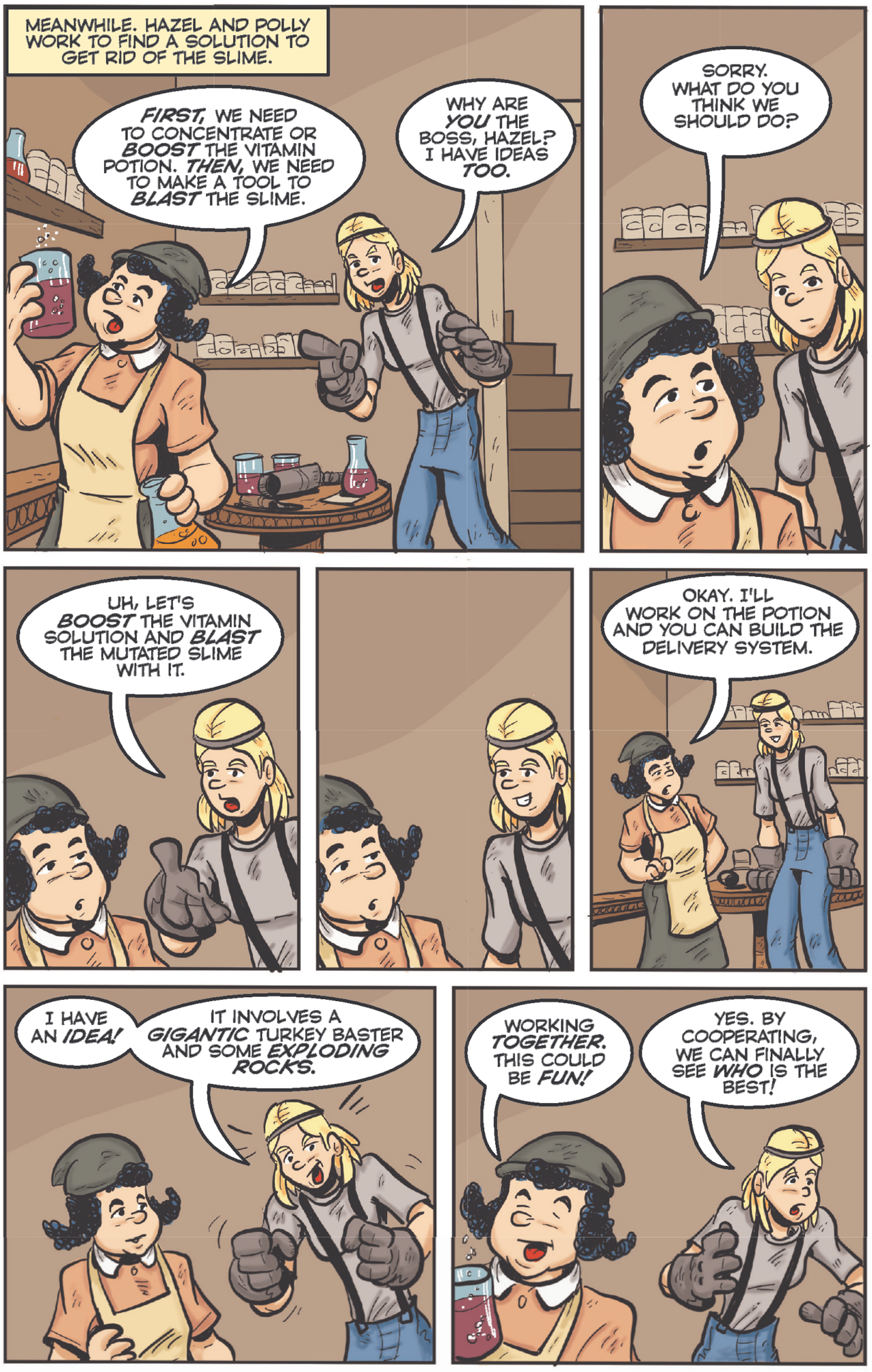
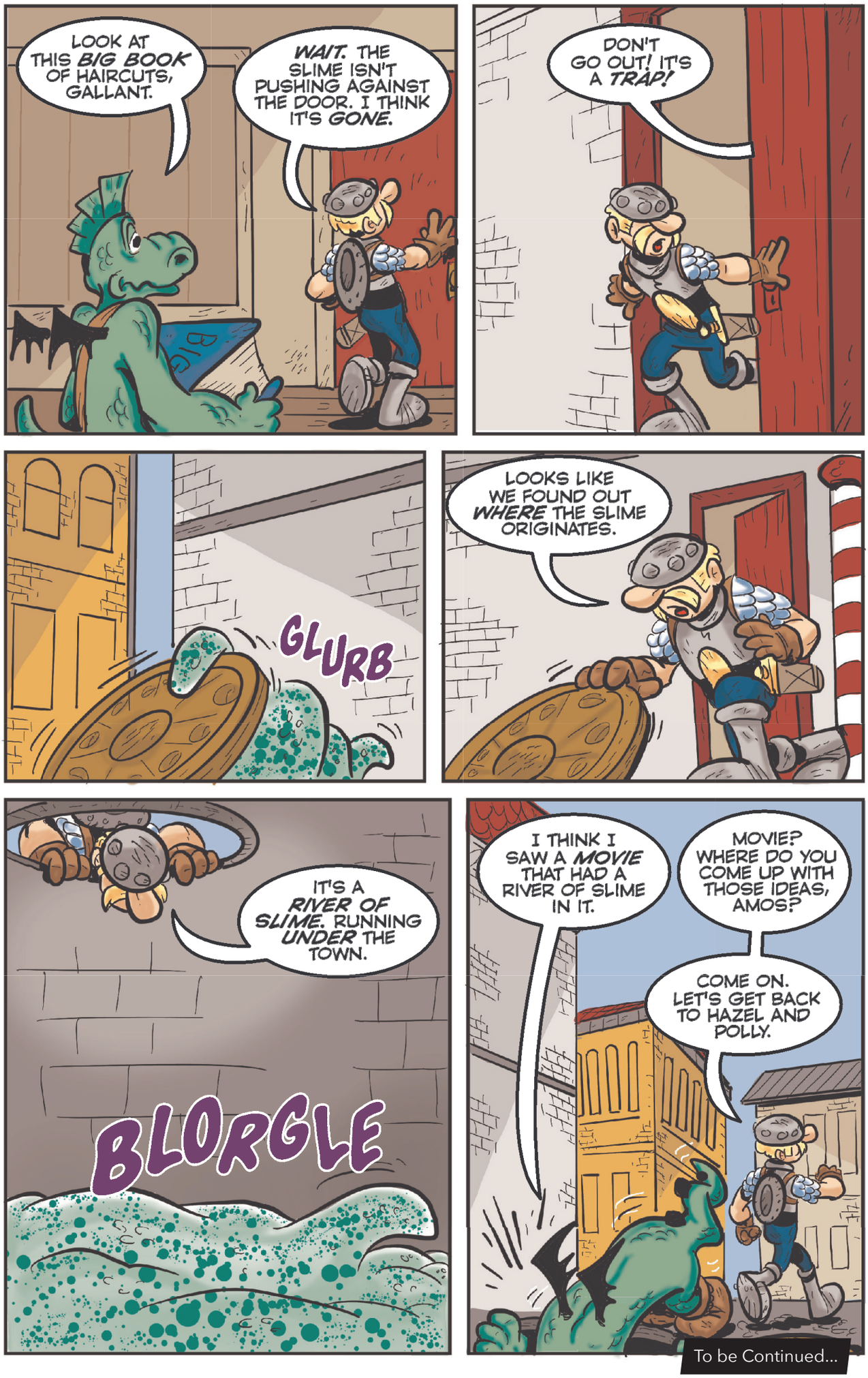

MEANWHILE. HAZEL AND POLLY WORK TO FIND A SOLUTION TO GET RID OF THE SLIME.
FIRST, WE NEED TO CONCENTRATE OR BOOST THE VITAMIN POTION. THEN, WE NEED TO MAKE A TOOL TO BLAST THE SLIME.
WHY ARE YOU THE BOSS, HAZEL? I HAVE IDEAS TOO.
SORRY. WHAT DO YOU THINK WE SHOULD DO?
UH, LET'S BOOST THE VITAMIN SOLUTION AND BLAST THE MUTATED SLIME WITH IT.
OKAY. I'LL WORK ON THE POTION AND YOU CAN BUILD THE DELIVERY SYSTEM.
I HAVE AN IDEA!
IT INVOLVES A GIGANTIC TURKEY BASTER AND SOME EXPLODING ROCKS.
WORKING TOGETHER. THIS COULD BE FUN!
YES. BY COOPERATING, WE CAN FINALLY SEE WHO IS THE BEST!


LOOK AT THIS *BIG BOOK* OF HAIRCUTS, GALLANT.
WAIT. THE SLIME ISN'T PUSHING AGAINST THE DOOR. I THINK IT'S *GONE.*
DON'T GO OUT! IT'S A *TRAP!*
GLURB
LOOKS LIKE WE FOUND OUT *WHERE* THE SLIME ORIGINATES.
IT'S A *RIVER OF SLIME.* RUNNING *UNDER* THE TOWN.
BLORGLE
I THINK I SAW A *MOVIE* THAT HAD A RIVER OF SLIME IN IT.
MOVIE? WHERE DO YOU COME UP WITH THOSE IDEAS, AMOS?
COME ON. LET'S GET BACK TO HAZEL AND POLLY.
To be Continued...

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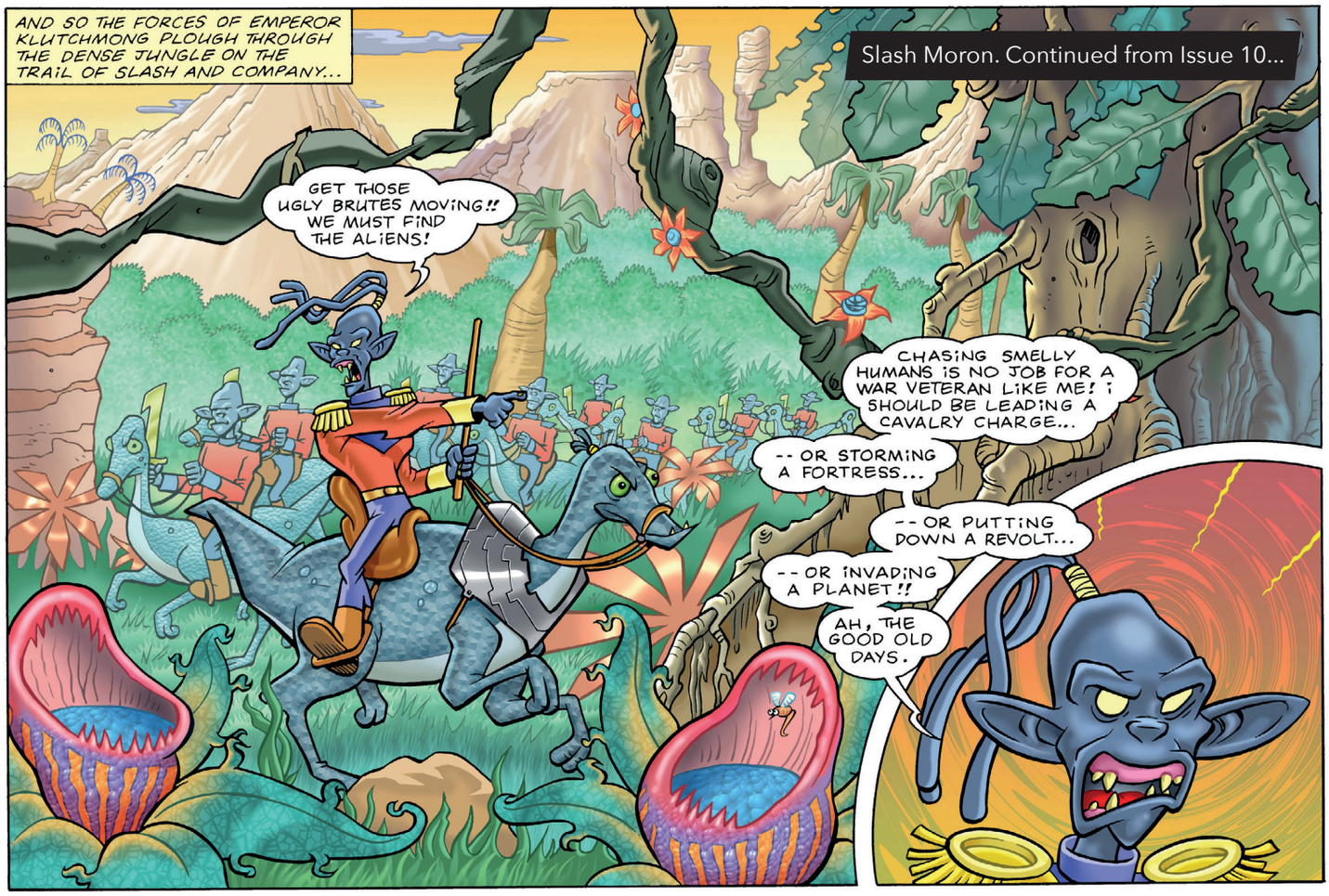
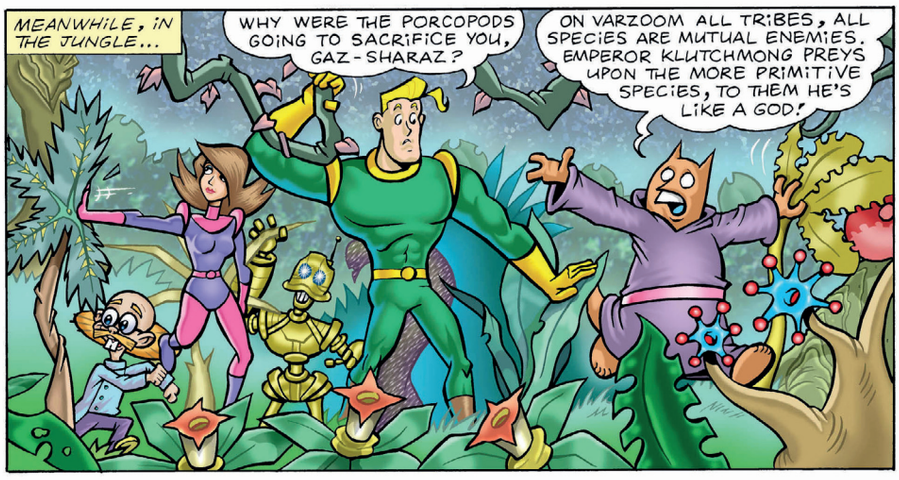
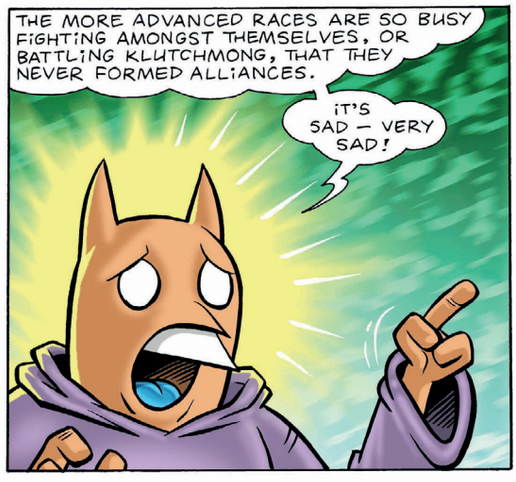
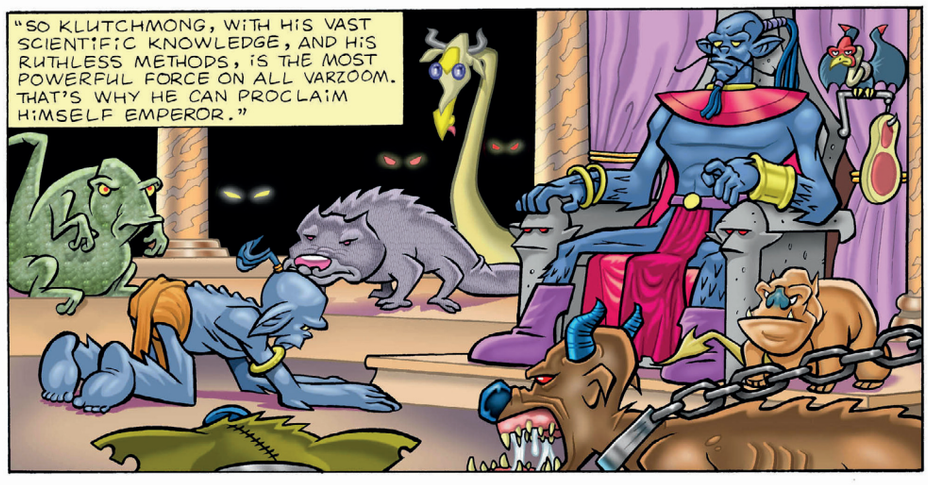
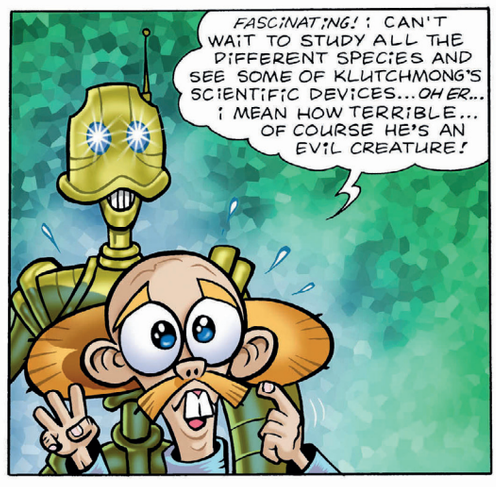
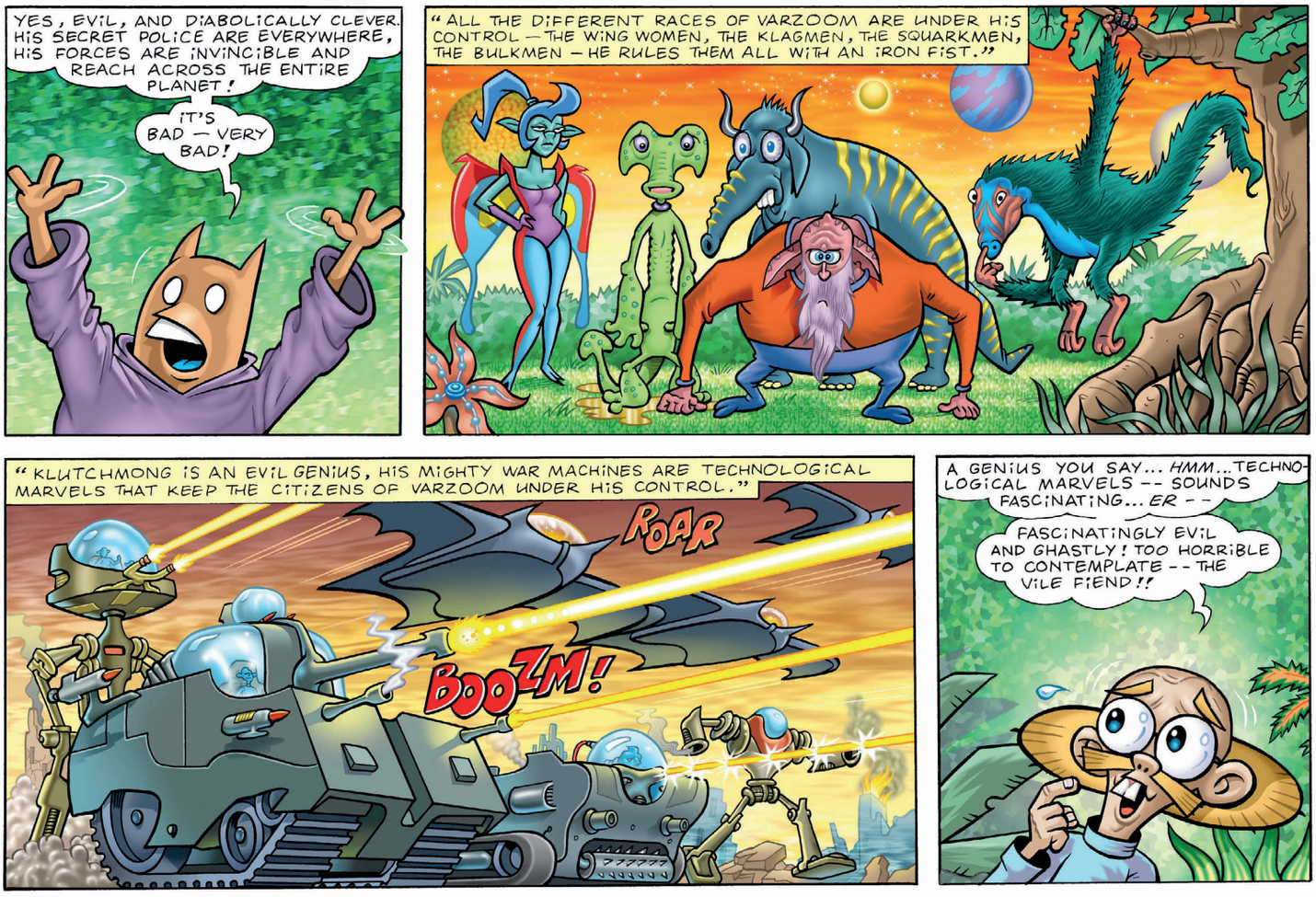

AND SO THE FORCES OF EMPEROR KLUTCHMONG PLOUGH THROUGH THE DENSE JUNGLE ON THE TRAIL OF SLASH AND COMPANY...
Slash Moron. Continued from Issue 10...
GET THOSE UGLY BRUTES MOVING!! WE MUST FIND THE ALIENS!
CHASING SMELLY HUMANS IS NO JOB FOR A WAR VETERAN LIKE ME! I SHOULD BE LEADING A CAVALRY CHARGE...
-- OR STORMING A FORTRESS...
-- OR PUTTING DOWN A REVOLT...
-- OR INVADING A PLANET!!
AH, THE GOOD OLD DAYS.

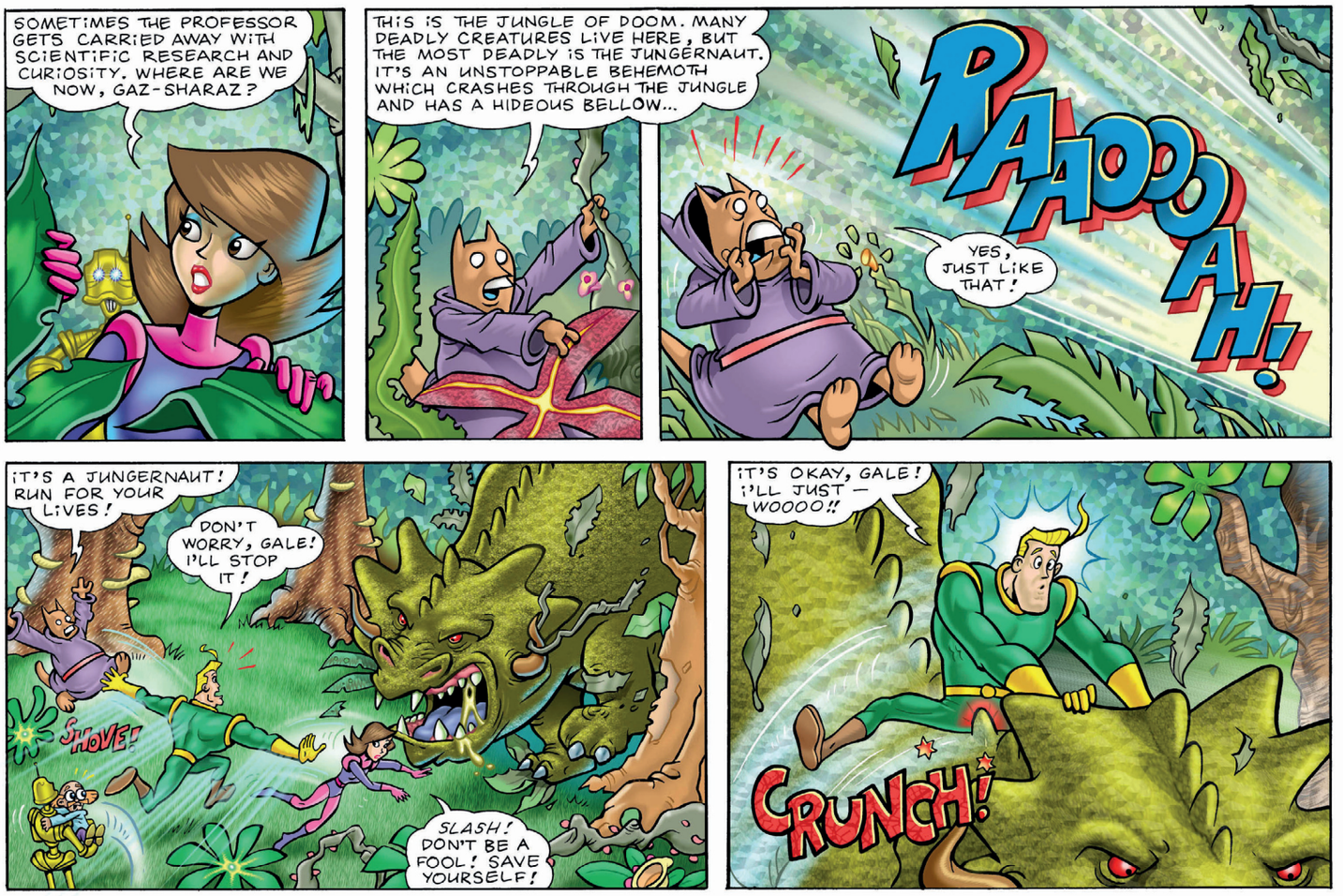

MEANWHILE, IN THE JUNGLE...
WHY WERE THE PORCOPODS GOING TO SACRIFICE YOU, GAZ-SHARAZ?
ON VARZOOM ALL TRIBES, ALL SPECIES ARE MUTUAL ENEMIES. EMPEROR KLUTCHMONG PREYS UPON THE MORE PRIMITIVE SPECIES, TO THEM HE'S LIKE A GOD!

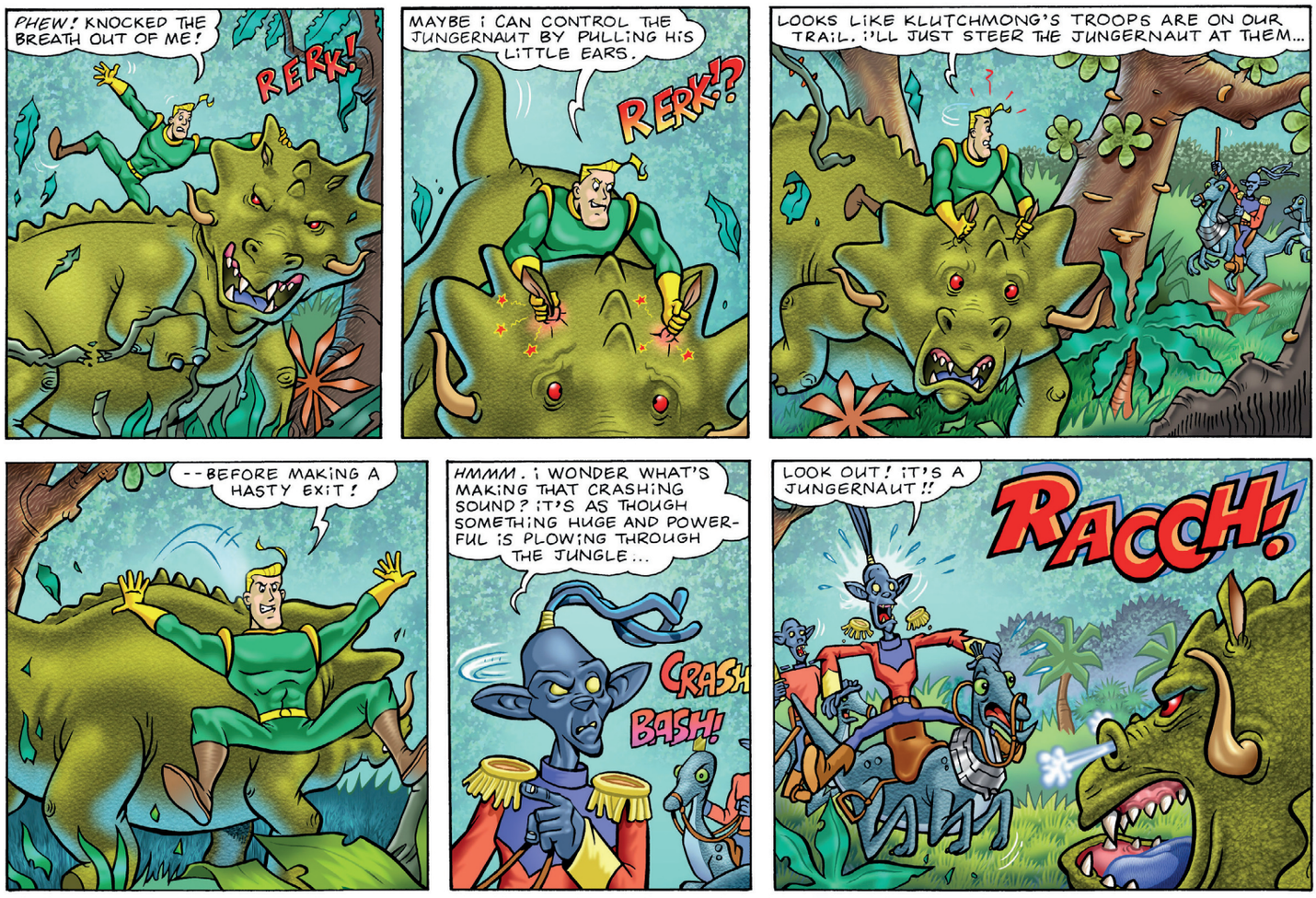

THE MORE ADVANCED RACES ARE SO BUSY FIGHTING AMONGST THEMSELVES, OR BATTLING KLUTCHMONG, THAT THEY NEVER FORMED ALLIANCES.
IT'S SAD – VERY SAD!

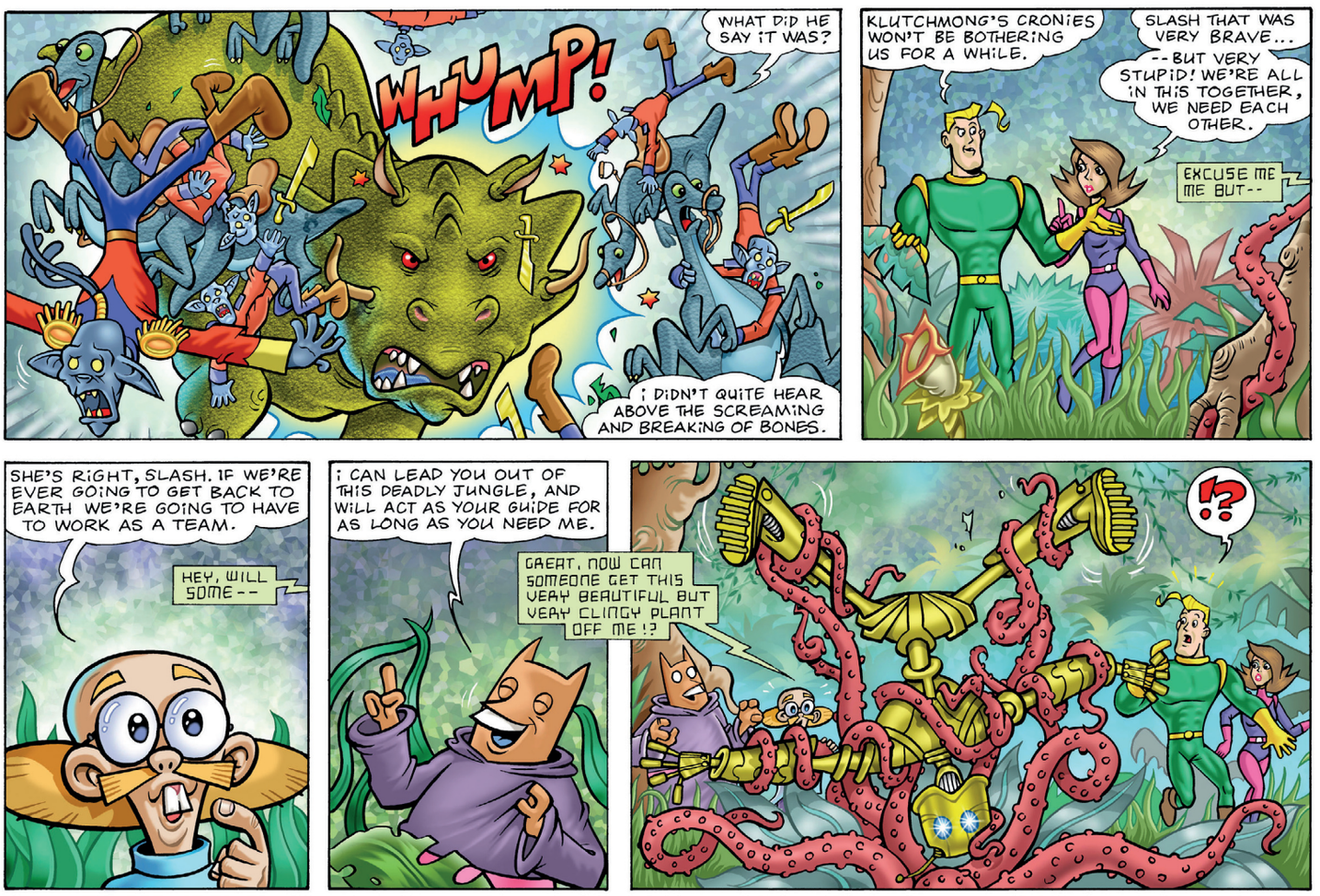

"SO KLUTCHMONG, WITH HIS VAST SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE, AND HIS RUTHLESS METHODS, IS THE MOST POWERFUL FORCE ON ALL VARZOOM. THAT'S WHY HE CAN PROCLAIM HIMSELF EMPEROR."

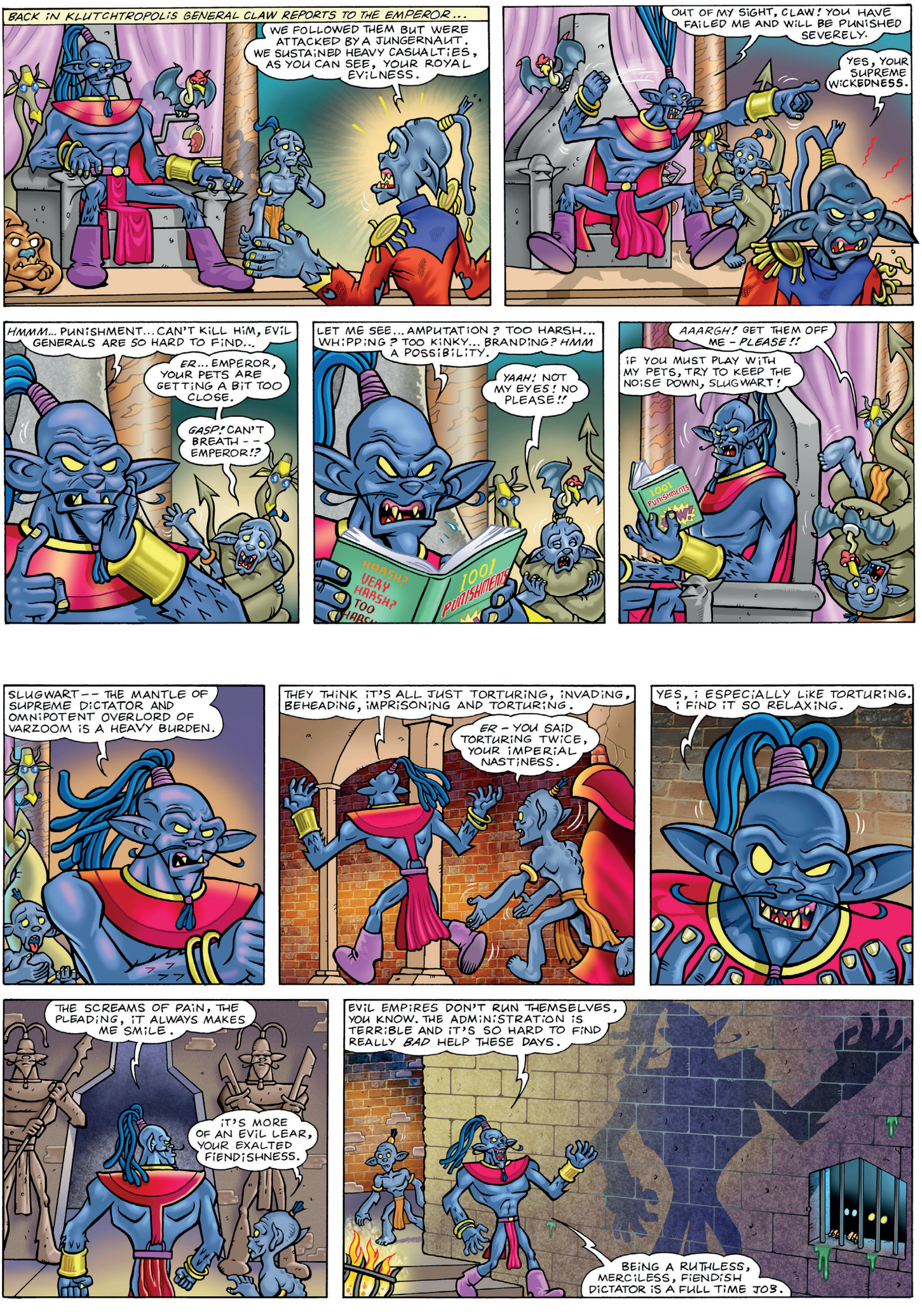

FASCINATING! I CAN'T WAIT TO STUDY ALL THE DIFFERENT SPECIES AND SEE SOME OF KLUTCHMONG'S SCIENTIFIC DEVICES... OH ER... I MEAN HOW TERRIBLE... OF COURSE HE'S AN EVIL CREATURE!

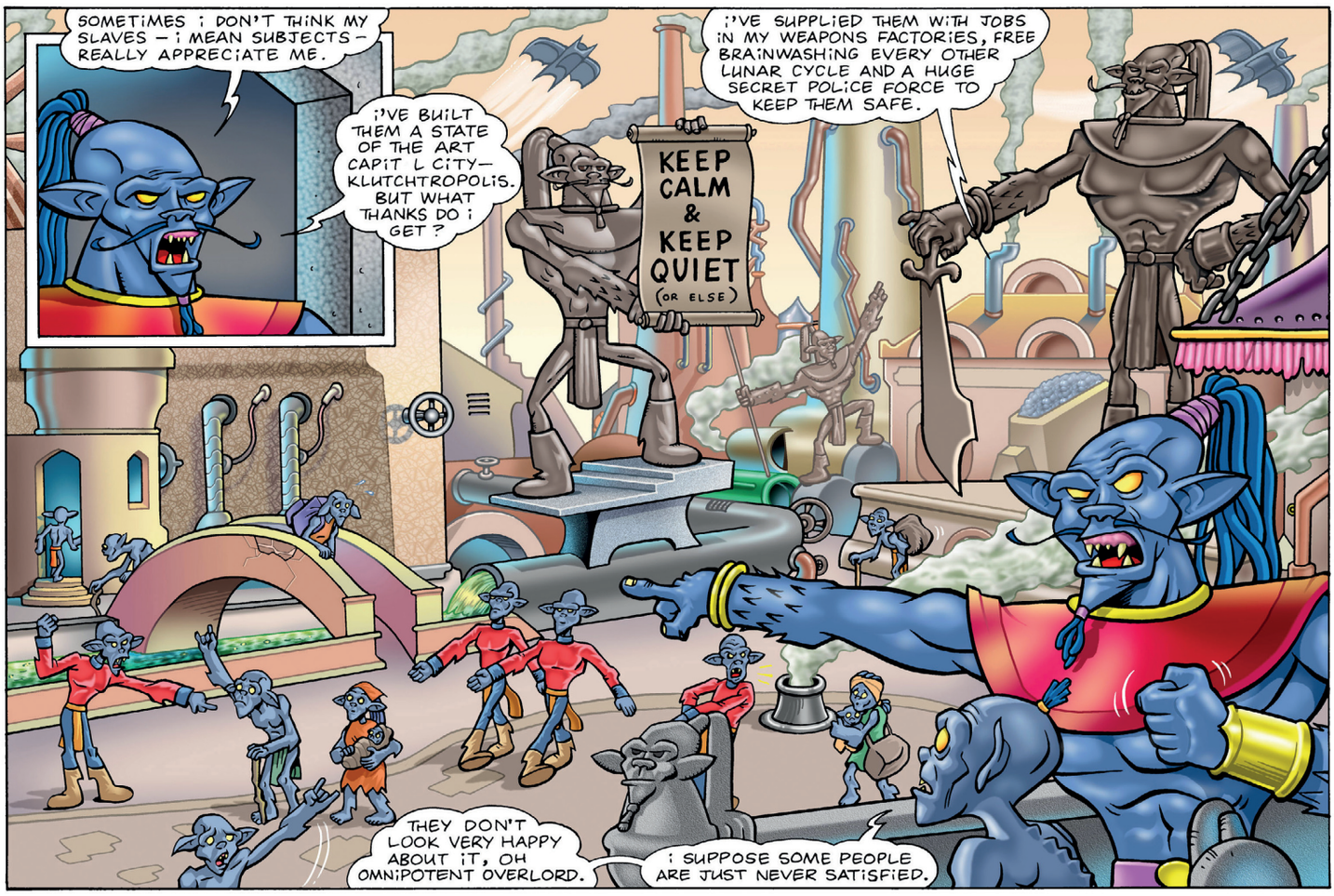

YES, EVIL, AND DIABOLICALLY CLEVER. HIS SECRET POLICE ARE EVERYWHERE, HIS FORCES ARE INVINCIBLE AND REACH ACROSS THE ENTIRE PLANET!
IT'S BAD — VERY BAD!
"ALL THE DIFFERENT RACES OF VARZOOM ARE UNDER HIS CONTROL — THE WING WOMEN, THE KLAGMEN, THE SQUARKMEN, THE BULKMEN — HE RULES THEM ALL WITH AN IRON FIST."
"KLUTCHMONG IS AN EVIL GENIUS, HIS MIGHTY WAR MACHINES ARE TECHNOLOGICAL MARVELS THAT KEEP THE CITIZENS OF VARZOOM UNDER HIS CONTROL."
ROAR
BOOZM!
A GENIUS YOU SAY... HMM...TECHNOLOGICAL MARVELS -- SOUNDS FASCINATING... ER --
FASCINATINGLY EVIL AND GHASTLY! TOO HORRIBLE TO CONTEMPLATE -- THE VILE FIEND!!

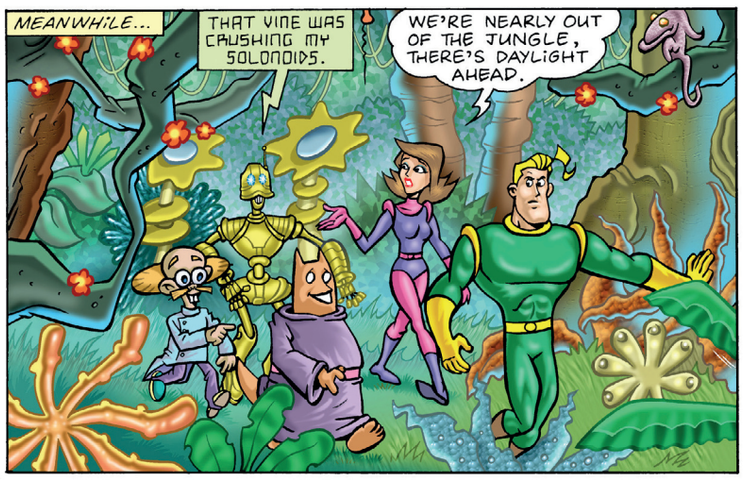

SOMETIMES THE PROFESSOR GETS CARRIED AWAY WITH SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH AND CURIOSITY. WHERE ARE WE NOW, GAZ-SHARAZ?
THIS IS THE JUNGLE OF DOOM. MANY DEADLY CREATURES LIVE HERE, BUT THE MOST DEADLY IS THE JUNGERNAUT. IT'S AN UNSTOPPABLE BEHEMOTH WHICH CRASHES THROUGH THE JUNGLE AND HAS A HIDEOUS BELLOW...
RAAOOOAH!
YES, JUST LIKE THAT!
IT'S A JUNGERNAUT! RUN FOR YOUR LIVES!
DON'T WORRY, GALE! I'LL STOP IT!
SHOVE!
SLASH! DON'T BE A FOOL! SAVE YOURSELF!
IT'S OKAY, GALE! I'LL JUST — WOOOO!!
CRUNCH!

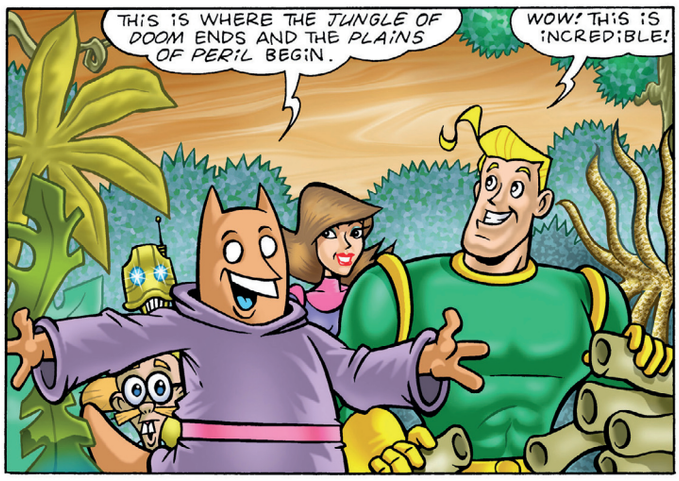

PHEW! KNOCKED THE BREATH OUT OF ME!
RERK!
MAYBE I CAN CONTROL THE JUNGERNAUT BY PULLING HIS LITTLE EARS.
RERK!?
LOOKS LIKE KLUTCHMONG'S TROOPS ARE ON OUR TRAIL. I'LL JUST STEER THE JUNGERNAUT AT THEM...
--BEFORE MAKING A HASTY EXIT!
HMMM. I WONDER WHAT'S MAKING THAT CRASHING SOUND? IT'S AS THOUGH SOMETHING HUGE AND POWERFUL IS PLOWING THROUGH THE JUNGLE...
CRASH
BASH!
LOOK OUT! IT'S A JUNGERNAUT!!
RACCH!

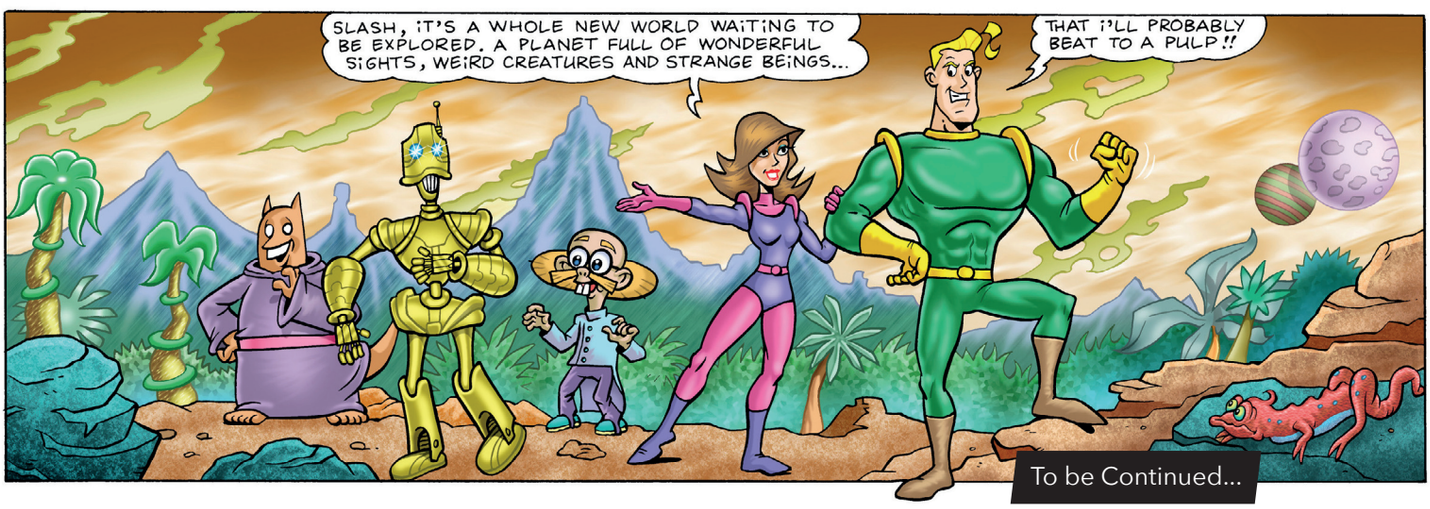

WHUMP!
WHAT DID HE SAY IT WAS?
I DIDN'T QUITE HEAR ABOVE THE SCREAMING AND BREAKING OF BONES.
KLUTCHMONG'S CRONIES WON'T BE BOTHERING US FOR A WHILE.
SLASH THAT WAS VERY BRAVE...
--BUT VERY STUPID! WE'RE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER, WE NEED EACH OTHER.
EXCUSE ME ME BUT--
SHE'S RIGHT, SLASH. IF WE'RE EVER GOING TO GET BACK TO EARTH WE'RE GOING TO HAVE TO WORK AS A TEAM.
HEY, WILL SOME--
I CAN LEAD YOU OUT OF THIS DEADLY JUNGLE, AND WILL ACT AS YOUR GUIDE FOR AS LONG AS YOU NEED ME.
GREAT. NOW CAN SOMEONE GET THIS VERY BEAUTIFUL BUT VERY CLINGY PLANT OFF ME!?
!?


BACK IN KLUTCHTROPOLIS GENERAL CLAW REPORTS TO THE EMPEROR...
WE FOLLOWED THEM BUT WERE ATTACKED BY A JUNGERNAUT. WE SUSTAINED HEAVY CASUALTIES, AS YOU CAN SEE, YOUR ROYAL EVILNESS.
OUT OF MY SIGHT, CLAW! YOU HAVE FAILED ME AND WILL BE PUNISHED SEVERELY.
YES, YOUR SUPREME WICKEDNESS.
HMMM... PUNISHMENT... CAN'T KILL HIM, EVIL GENERALS ARE SO HARD TO FIND...
ER... EMPEROR, YOUR PETS ARE GETTING A BIT TOO CLOSE.
GASP! CAN'T BREATH - - EMPEROR!?
LET ME SEE... AMPUTATION? TOO HARSH... WHIPPING? TOO KINKY... BRANDING? HMM A POSSIBILITY.
YAAH! NOT MY EYES! NO PLEASE!!
1001 PUNISHMENTS
AAARGH! GET THEM OFF ME - PLEASE!!
IF YOU MUST PLAY WITH MY PETS, TRY TO KEEP THE NOISE DOWN, SLUGWART!
SLUGWART - - THE MANTLE OF SUPREME DICTATOR AND OMNIPOTENT OVERLORD OF VARZOOM IS A HEAVY BURDEN.
THEY THINK IT'S ALL JUST TORTURING, INVADING, BEHEADING, IMPRISONING AND TORTURING.
ER - YOU SAID TORTURING TWICE, YOUR IMPERIAL NASTINESS.
YES, I ESPECIALLY LIKE TORTURING. I FIND IT SO RELAXING.
THE SCREAMS OF PAIN, THE PLEADING, IT ALWAYS MAKES ME SMILE.
IT'S MORE OF AN EVIL LEAR, YOUR EXALTED FIENDISHNESS.
EVIL EMPIRES DON'T RUN THEMSELVES, YOU KNOW. THE ADMINISTRATION IS TERRIBLE AND IT'S SO HARD TO FIND REALLY BAD HELP THESE DAYS.
BEING A RUTHLESS, MERCILESS, FIENDISH DICTATOR IS A FULL TIME JOB.


SOMETIMES I DON'T THINK MY SLAVES – I MEAN SUBJECTS – REALLY APPRECIATE ME.
I'VE BUILT THEM A STATE OF THE ART CAPIT L CITY– KLUTCHTROPOLIS. BUT WHAT THANKS DO I GET ?
I'VE SUPPLIED THEM WITH JOBS IN MY WEAPONS FACTORIES, FREE BRAINWASHING EVERY OTHER LUNAR CYCLE AND A HUGE SECRET POLICE FORCE TO KEEP THEM SAFE.
KEEP CALM & KEEP QUIET (OR ELSE)
THEY DON'T LOOK VERY HAPPY ABOUT IT, OH OMNIPOTENT OVERLORD.
I SUPPOSE SOME PEOPLE ARE JUST NEVER SATISFIED.


MEANWHILE...
THAT VINE WAS CRUSHING MY SOLONOIDS.
WE'RE NEARLY OUT OF THE JUNGLE, THERE'S DAYLIGHT AHEAD.


THIS IS WHERE THE JUNGLE OF DOOM ENDS AND THE PLAINS OF PERIL BEGIN.
WOW! THIS IS INCREDIBLE!

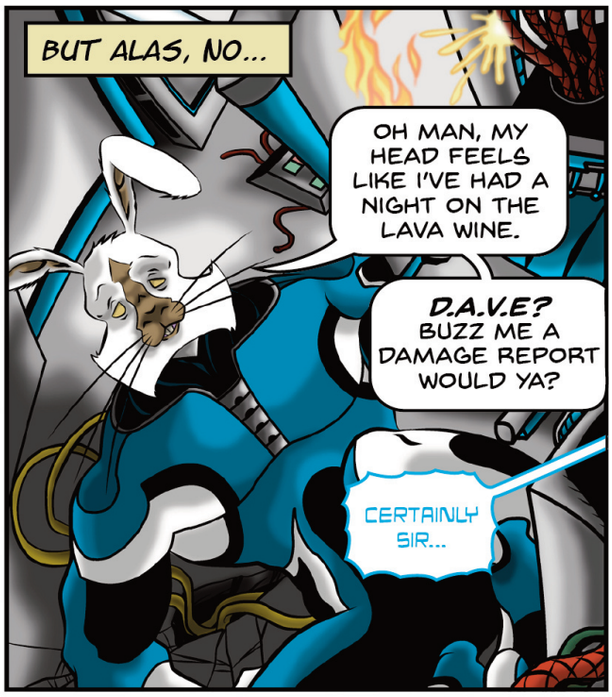

SLASH, IT'S A WHOLE NEW WORLD WAITING TO BE EXPLORED. A PLANET FULL OF WONDERFUL SIGHTS, WEIRD CREATURES AND STRANGE BEINGS...
THAT I'LL PROBABLY BEAT TO A PULP !!
To be Continued...

Megatomic Battle Rabbit. Continued from Issue 10...

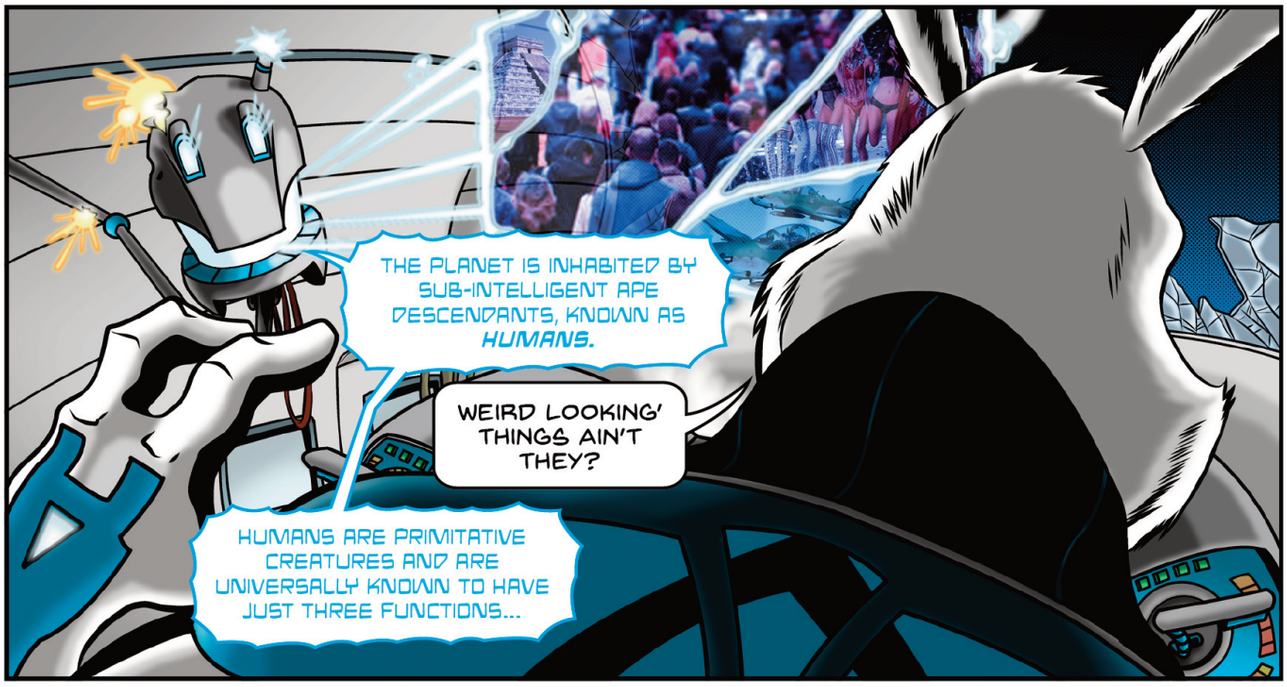
EVERYTHING WAS DARK FOR A SECOND AND AS THE COPPERY TANG OF BLOOD FILLED MEGATOMIC BATTLE RABBIT'S MOUTH...

...HE THOUGHT HE MIGHT BE DEAD...

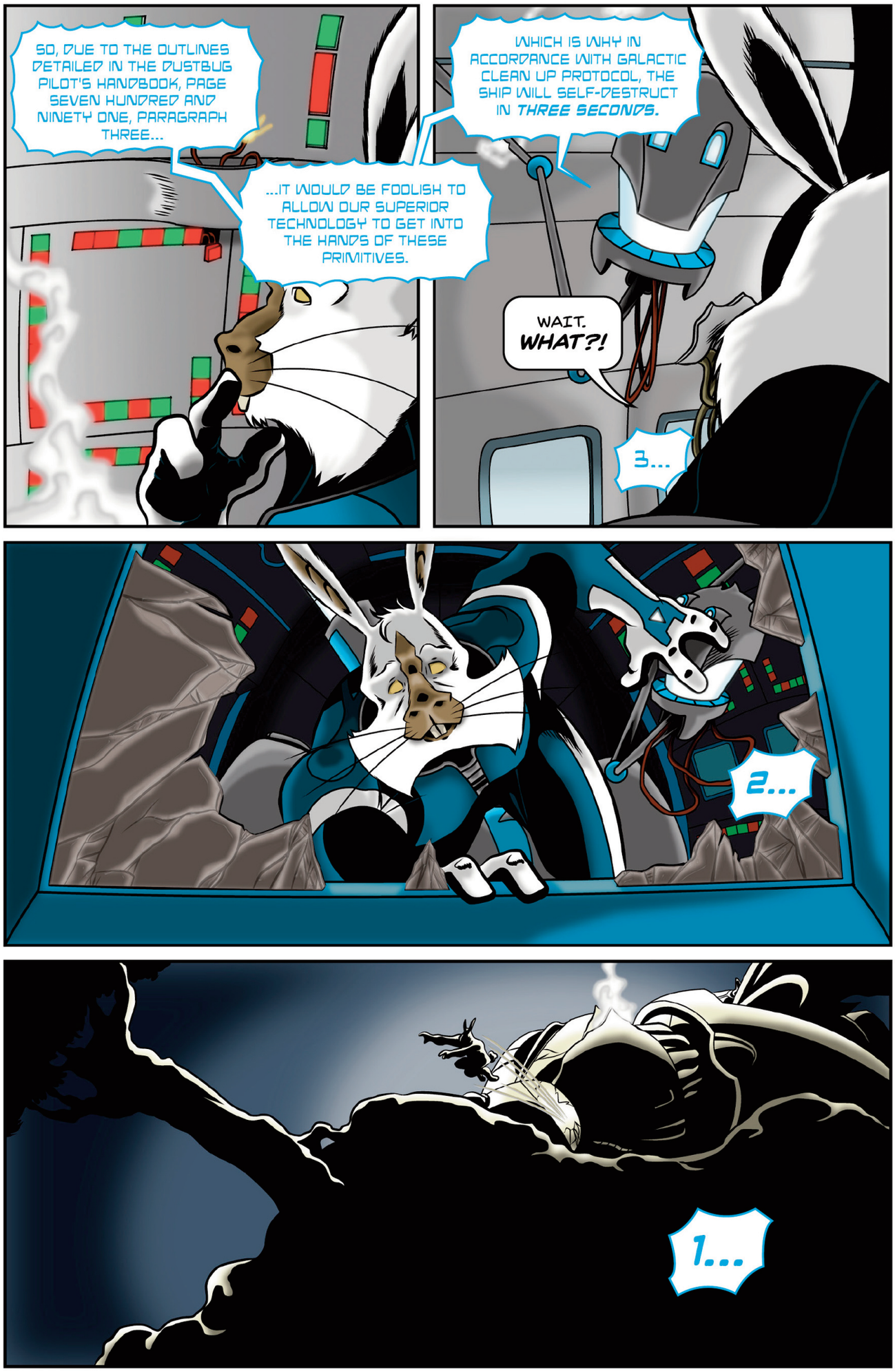
...AND THEN HE THOUGHT ABOUT HOW THAT WAS ABSOLUTELY FINE.








NUMBER ONE:
THE INGESTION OF A VAST VARIETY OF UNHEALTHY FOODS.
POUK SOK SU ON
THESE ARE OFTEN THE DEEP FRIED REMAINS OF NON-HUMAN SPECIES.
NUMBER TWO:
WILLINGLY CONSUMING LARGE QUANTITIES OF MIND ALTERING DRINKS, NOT ONLY DOES THIS USUALLY RESULT IN HOURS BEING LOST DUE TO MASS VOMITING...
...BUT OFTEN LEADS TO NUMBER THREE...
...HURTING EACH OTHER.
SOME TIMES ON A GRAND SCALE.


SO, DUE TO THE OUTLINES DETAILED IN THE DUSTBUG PILOT'S HANDBOOK, PAGE SEVEN HUNDRED AND NINETY ONE, PARAGRAPH THREE...
...IT WOULD BE FOOLISH TO ALLOW OUR SUPERIOR TECHNOLOGY TO GET INTO THE HANDS OF THESE PRIMITIVES.
WHICH IS WHY IN ACCORDANCE WITH GALACTIC CLEAN UP PROTOCOL, THE SHIP WILL SELF-DESTRUCT IN THREE SECONDS.
WAIT. WHAT?!
3...
2...
1...

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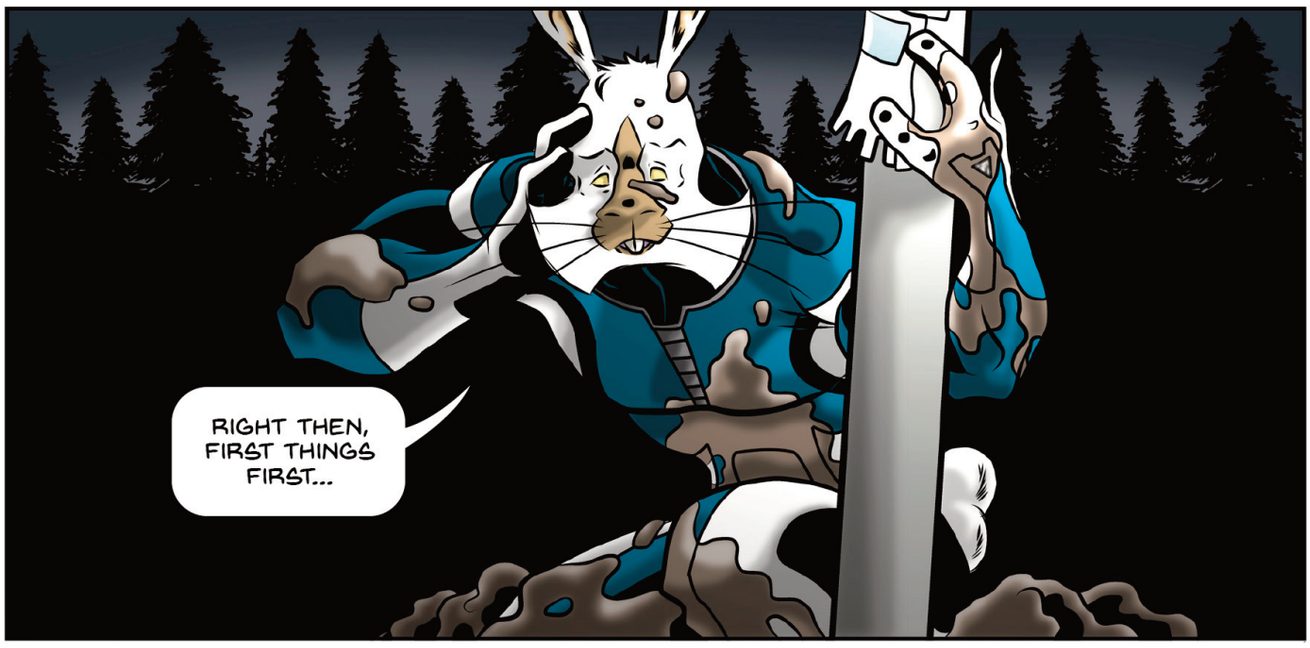
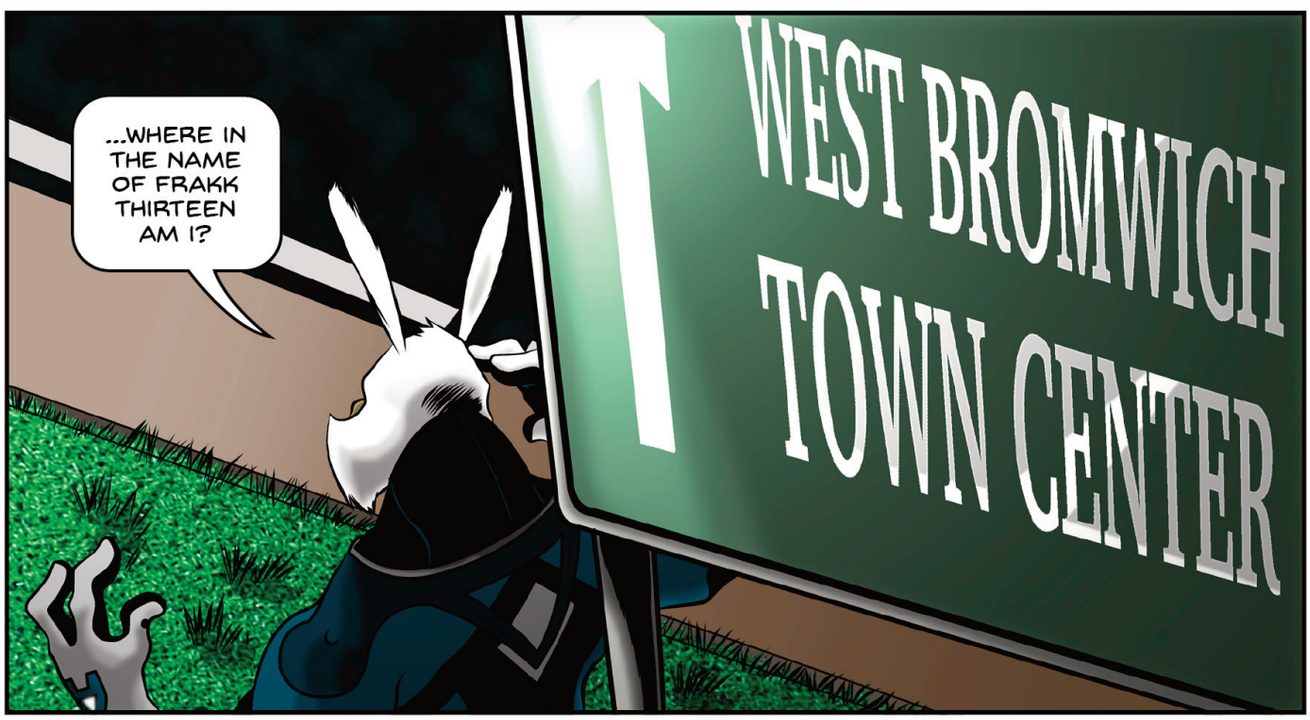
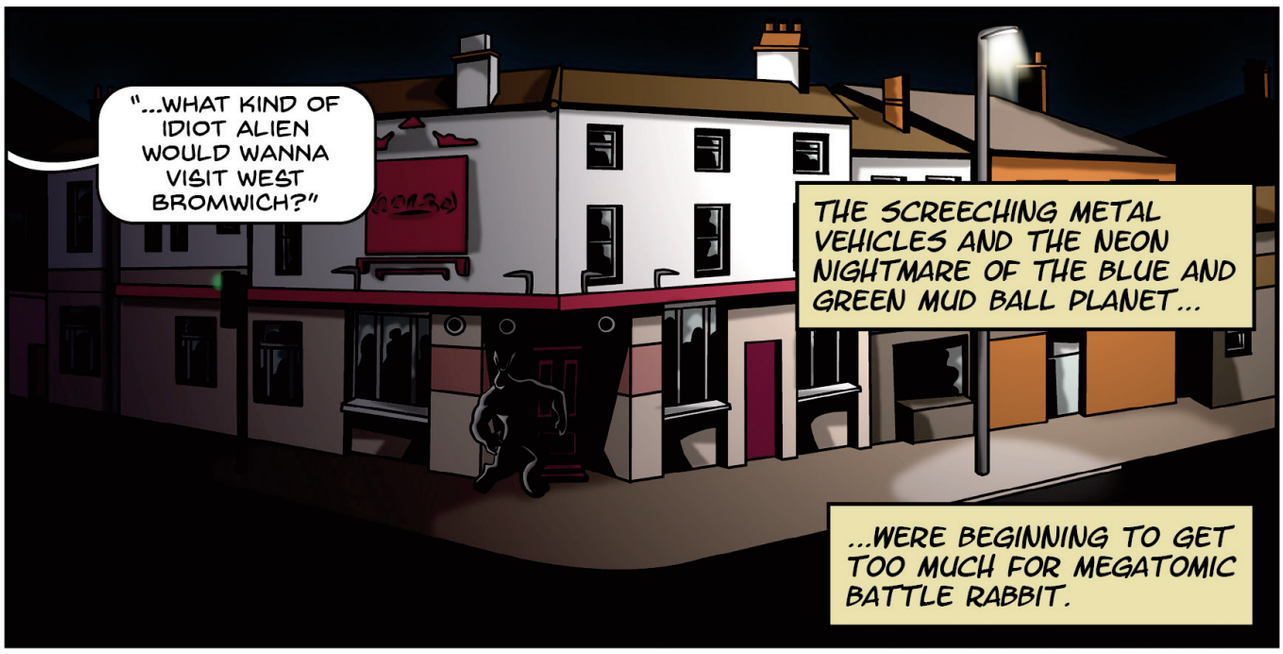
THUD!
UFF!

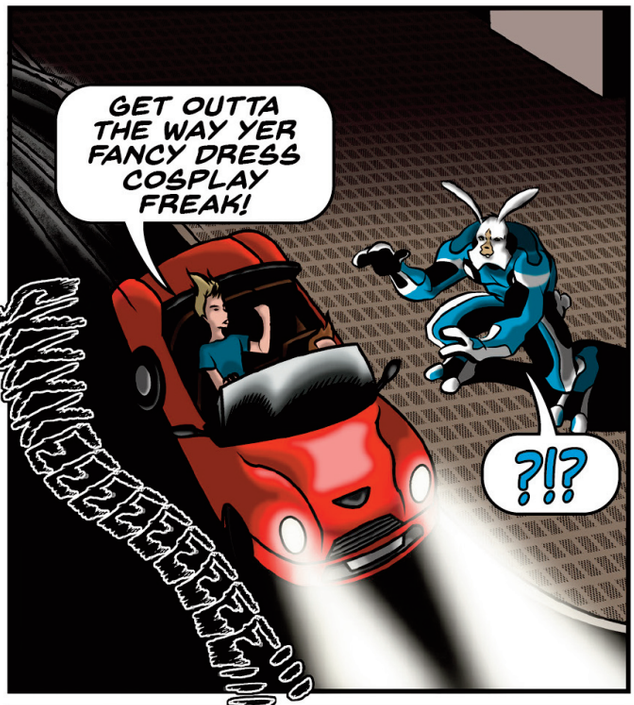

RIGHT THEN, FIRST THINGS FIRST...


...WHERE IN THE NAME OF FRAKK THIRTEEN AM I?
WEST BROMWICH
TOWN CENTER


MEANWHILE...
DEXTER? CAN YOU HEAR ME?
HELLLOOO?
WAKE UP SPACE BOY!!!
HUH?!
OH HEY HENRY, WHAT'S UP?
DIDN'T SEE YA THERE.
DIDN'T SEE ME? I'VE BEEN SHOUTING AT YOU FOR THE LAST FIVE MINUTES YA BIG DOPE!
WHAT YOU DOIN?
I SAW A BLUE FLASHING LIGHT, IT SORTA FELL OUTTA THE SKY.
AND WHAT IS IT?
SPACE TRACE
I CAN'T BE SURE, BUT I'M PRETTY SURE IT'S...
OH MAN! HERE WE GO AGAIN...


HENRY HAD LOST COUNT OF THE AMOUNT OF TIMES DEXTER HAD LEAD HIM ON SOME SUPPOSED INTERGALACTIC ADVENTURE...
... TO UNEARTH THE UNKNOWN...
IT'S OVER HERE, THE LIGHT IS OVER THERE!!!!
...ONLY TO FIND THAT THE PROMISE OF LITTLE GREEN MEN WAS IN FACT SOMETHING QUITE ORDINARY.
DEXTER, DUDE...
...I DUNNO HOW TO SAY THIS, BUT...




GET OUTTA THE WAY YER FANCY DRESS COSPLAY FREAK!
?!?
EEEE

WHACKOMAN!

BY MARC JACKSON

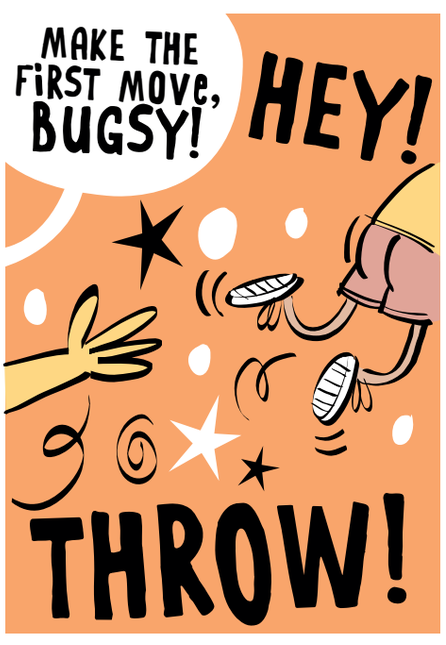
TRAPPED IN SHEILA'S PURSE, OUR HEROES FIND THEMSELVES FACE TO FACE WITH A THREAT OF WHICH THE LIKES THEY HAVE NEVER SEEN!...

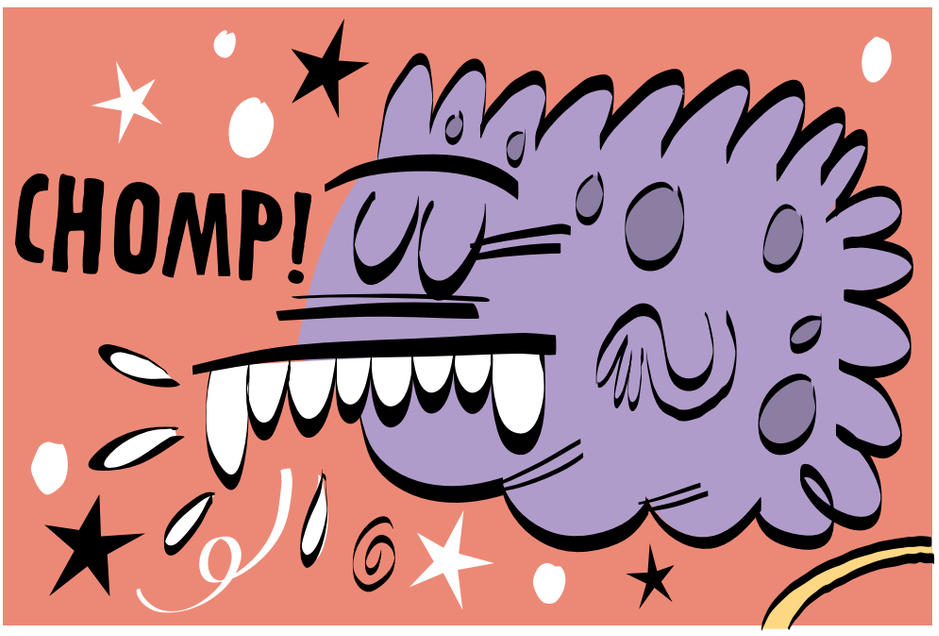














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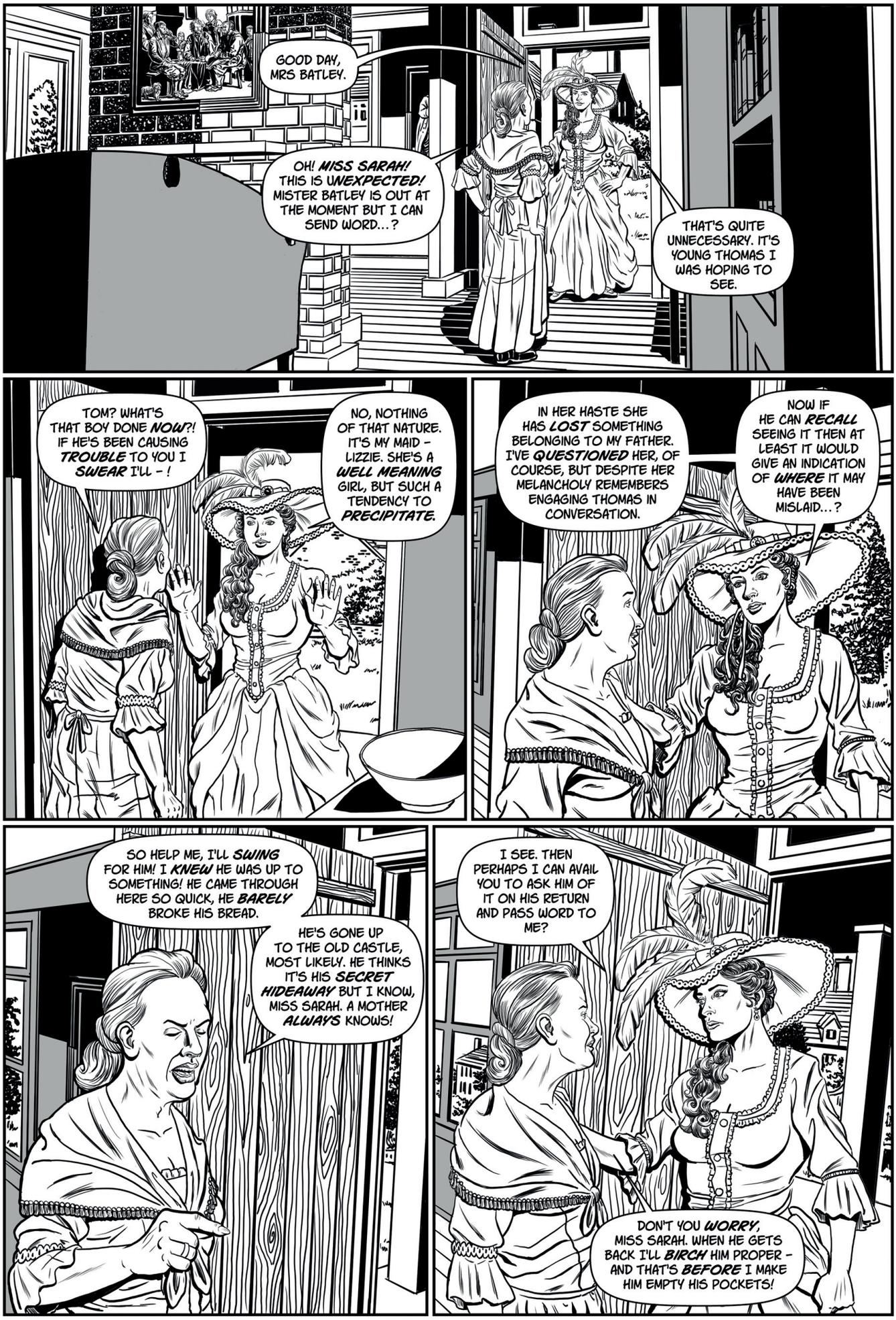
FLINTLOCK. CONTINUES FROM ISSUE 10...




GOOD DAY, MRS BATLEY.
OH! MISS SARAH! THIS IS UNEXPECTED! MISTER BATLEY IS OUT AT THE MOMENT BUT I CAN SEND WORD...?
THAT'S QUITE UNNECESSARY. IT'S YOUNG THOMAS I WAS HOPING TO SEE.
TOM? WHAT'S THAT BOY DONE NOW?! IF HE'S BEEN CAUSING TROUBLE TO YOU I SWEAR I'LL - !
NO, NOTHING OF THAT NATURE. IT'S MY MAID - LIZZIE. SHE'S A WELL MEANING GIRL, BUT SUCH A TENDENCY TO PRECIPITATE.
IN HER HASTE SHE HAS LOST SOMETHING BELONGING TO MY FATHER. I'VE QUESTIONED HER, OF COURSE, BUT DESPITE HER MELANCHOLY REMEMBERS ENGAGING THOMAS IN CONVERSATION.
NOW IF HE CAN RECALL SEEING IT THEN AT LEAST IT WOULD GIVE AN INDICATION OF WHERE IT MAY HAVE BEEN MISLAID...?
SO HELP ME, I'LL SWING FOR HIM! I KNEW HE WAS UP TO SOMETHING! HE CAME THROUGH HERE SO QUICK, HE BARELY BROKE HIS BREAD.
HE'S GONE UP TO THE OLD CASTLE, MOST LIKELY. HE THINKS IT'S HIS SECRET HIDEAWAY BUT I KNOW, MISS SARAH. A MOTHER ALWAYS KNOWS!
I SEE. THEN PERHAPS I CAN AVAIL YOU TO ASK HIM OF IT ON HIS RETURN AND PASS WORD TO ME?
DON'T YOU WORRY, MISS SARAH. WHEN HE GETS BACK I'LL BIRCH HIM PROPER - AND THAT'S BEFORE I MAKE HIM EMPTY HIS POCKETS!


I THINK YOU'RE RIGHT, LIZZIE - THE BOY'S TAKEN IT.
I WAS *SURE*, MISS! IT HAPPENED WHEN I DROPPED THE BASKET, *I KNOW IT DID!*
WHAT ARE WE TO DO NOW?
HIS MOTHER THINKS HE'S GONE UP TO *THE RUINS*, SO THAT SEEMS THE BEST PLACE TO START.
WE CAN'T DRIVE UP THERE! YOU'LL NEED WINTER *SADDLED UP* AGAIN FOR THAT...
...AND BETTER PRIVACY TOO!
BACK TO THE HOUSE AS QUICK AS YOU CAN, FAIRFAX!
MUM...
LOOK, MISS! THERE SEEMS A BIT OF A TO-DO OUTSIDE THE *TAVERN!*
IT CAN'T CONCERN US, WHATEVER IT IS. WE'VE ENOUGH TO WORRY ABOUT AS IT IS!

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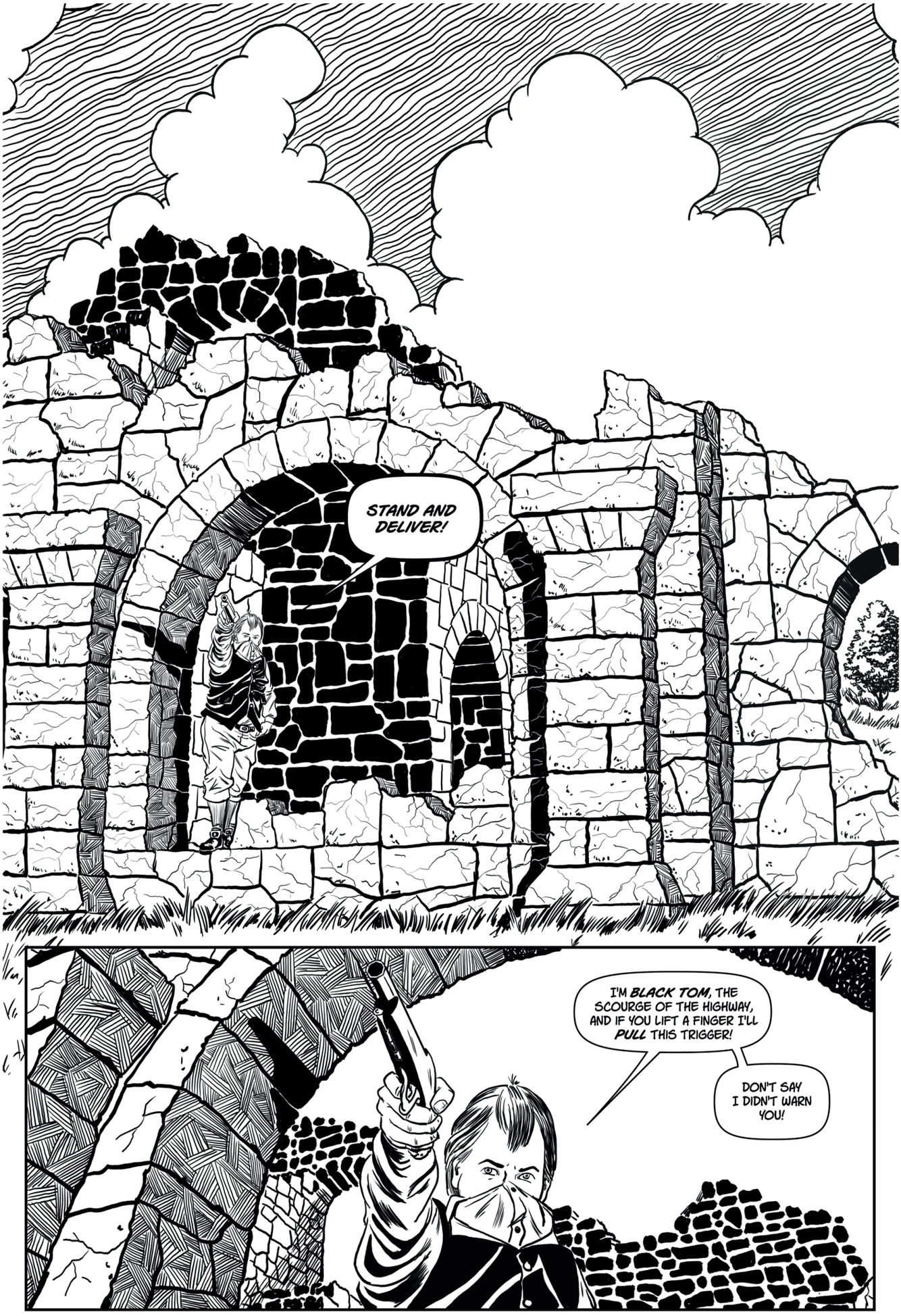


CLICK
WHAT SAY YOU TO *THAT*?
I SAY WHAT'S A YOUNG MAN LIKE YOU DOING WITH SUCH A FINE PISTOL!
SIR, YOU *STARTLED* ME!
AYE, WELL, YOU STARTLED ME WITH ALL YOUR NOISE. GOT A NAME, EH?
THOMAS BATLEY, SIR.
DO YOU LIVE HERE, SIR? I'VE NEVER SEEN YOU AFORE, AND I VISIT THIS PLACE *OFTEN*.
DO YOU, NOW? AND WHAT DO YOUR ACQUAINTANCES THINK ABOUT THAT?
THEY DON'T KNOW, SIR. I DON'T TELL THEM.
SO *NOBODY* KNOWS YOU'RE HERE THIS DAY, EH?
WELL, WELL, WELL. THERE'S A THING.


ROUSE YOURSELF, JUDGE CAXTON,
WE'VE MATTERS TO DISCUSS!
BAM BAM BAM
SORRY, SIR, BUT HIS HONOUR IS – OH!
I'VE NO TIME FOR THIS! CAXTON! IF YOU'RE STILL IN YOUR BED CHAMBER THIS LATE IN THE DAY DRAG YOURSELF FROM IT BEFORE I DO!
GOOD DAY, MISTER FROBISHER, FOR WHAT DO I OWE THE PLEASURE?
IT'S NO PLEASURE – IT'S A DAMNED DISGRACE!
I'M SORRY, SIR, BUT HE JUST BARGED IN!
THAT'S QUITE ALRIGHT, MURIEL. IF YOU COULD ARRANGE ONE MORE PLATE FOR LUNCHEON...
...SO, ELIAS, NOW WE ARE ALONE PERHAPS A CALMER EXPLANATION WOULD BE APPROPRIATE?
WE HAVE MOVED BEYOND CALM, WILLIAM!


YOU ASSURED US THAT PLAN OF YOURS WOULD PUT AN END TO OUR HIGHWAYMAN - BUT IT SEEMS TO HAVE MADE THINGS WORSE!
NOT ONLY ARE THE COACHES STILL BEING ROBBED, BUT NOW THEY'VE FOUND A DEAD MAN AT THE ROAD-SIDE!
A BODY? WHOSE?
THAT IS STILL TO BE DETERMINED, BUT THE FELLOW'S HORSE WAS CANTERING THROUGH THE VILLAGE AND THE FELLOW HIMSELF IS BEING LAID OUT AS WE SPEAK.
YOUR HIRED BRAVO SEEMS ONLY TO HAVE RILED OUR HIGHWAYMAN UP AND MADE A BAD SITUATION WORSE!
I ASSURE YOU MISTER HAWKE'S CREDENTIALS SEEMED ENTIRELY IN ORDER. HIS METHODS, HOWEVER, WERE PERHAPS SOMEWHAT DIFFERENT...
WELL, I THINK HE PLAYED US ALL FOR FOOLS, WITH YOU THE BIGGEST FOOL OF ALL!
WATCH YOUR WORDS. WHILST I UNDERSTAND YOUR VEXATION YOU WOULD DO WELL TO REMEMBER YOUR PLACE IN THE GRAND SCHEME OF THINGS. DON'T OVERSTEP YOUR MARK.
AND IF I DO, WHAT THEN? WHAT WILL YOU DO ABOUT IT?
ME? WHY, NOTHING AT ALL. HOWEVER, MY "HIRED BRAVO" WILL NO DOUBT TAKE A LESS FORGIVING APPROACH.
I'LL LEAVE YOU TWO GENTLEMEN TO DISCUSS THINGS MORE PRIVATELY...



TO BE CONTINUED...

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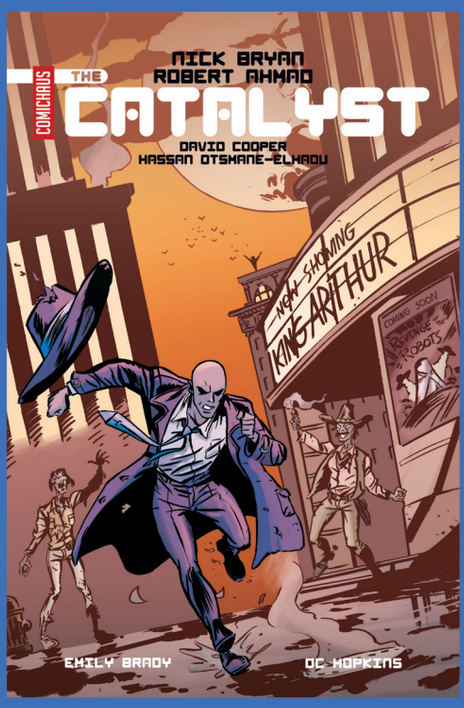

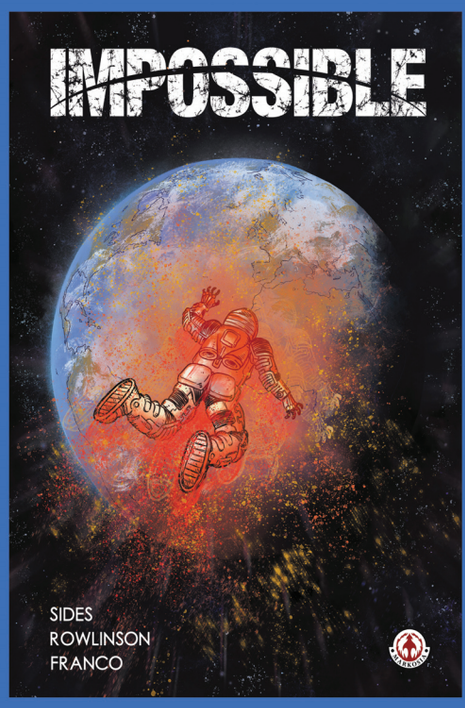



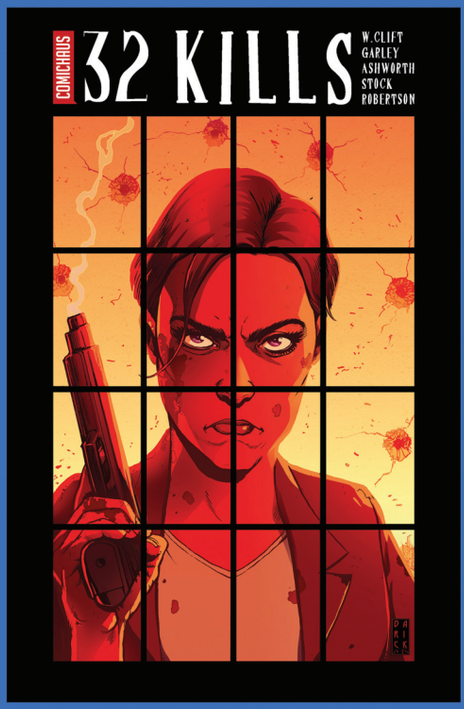



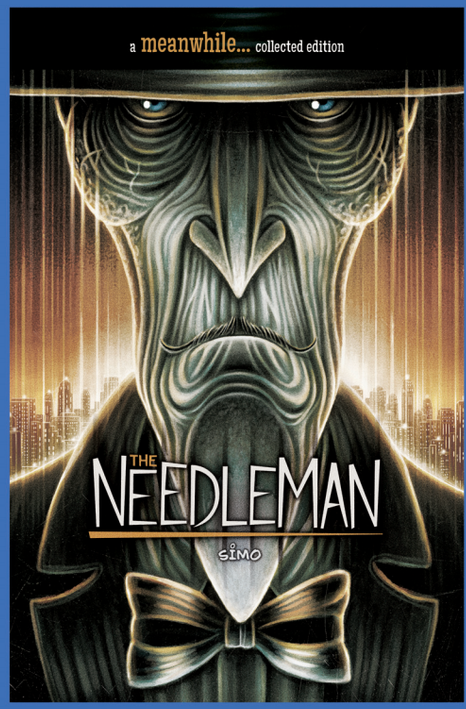

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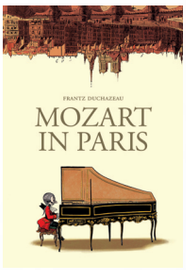
EURO-SCENE

EUROPEAN COMIC REVIEWS



Title: Mozart in Paris
Author: Frantz Duchazeau
Origin: France
Publisher: SelfMadeHero
Price: £14.99

SelfMadeHero's mantra is: "SelfMadeHero aims to publish works that provoke, entertain, inspire and inform through the medium of the graphic novel."

Frantz Duchazeau's Mozart in Paris is a fine example of how SelfMadeHero are able to act upon their raison d'être very successfully.

The first thing that should be said about this publication (released on 26th September) is that you do not need to be a fan of either Mozart or classical music in general to enjoy this book.

Duchazeau takes us into the heart of Mozart's formative years in Paris where he took residence for a mere six months to escape his father and search for inspiration as he tried to shake his reputation as a child-prodigy on his journey into manhood.

We learn that Mozart's time in the French capital was a frustrating one from a creative and musical point of view but Duchazeau also treats us to a mischievous Mozart too.

Despite the knock backs and difficulties he had with Parisian socialites, we see a Mozart eager to experiment with both music and life. He challenges social and musical convention and seems to very much enjoy doing so.

Duchazeau hails from French comics Mecca Angoulême, although he has lived in Paris for over 25 years. His artwork takes us to the core of nineteenth century Parisian streets and scenes with some lovely, intricate drawings.

When he wants to bring the novel's characters to the forefront the backgrounds are generally filled with solid colour, as opposed to the sketching technique used in the panels carrying our Parisian backdrop.

This allows the reader to really appreciate the City of Light's landscape whilst keeping a good grasp of Mozart's whirlwind adventure there.

Mozart died a pauper and he appeared to have some quite epic battles with members of high society in France in order to get to play what he wanted and how he wanted to do it.

It seems a grave miscarriage of justice that his genius was not appreciated when he was alive by a wider audience or that he was unable to profit from his revolutionary work himself.

Franz Duchazeau's Mozart in Paris in an intriguing take on a small chapter of Mozart's life, and it is the perfect introduction to Mozart for anyone who doesn't know much about him but is hungry to know more.



Title: Monster Allergy 1. House of Monsters
Artwork: Alessandro Barbucci and Barbara Canepa
Script: Katja Centomo and Francesco Artibani
Origin: Italy
Publisher: Europe Comics
Price: €4.99

Monster Allergy, House of Monsters is the first installment of a fun series of comics for families and young people, which follows around two friends on their whacky adventures.

Elena and Zick are two misfits in a small suburb of Bigburg called Oldmill Village. Our two protagonists, who first meet when Elena's family move to Oldmill. Originally, she is warned away from Zick by two nosey neighbours but they bond after Elena gets involved in a fight with bullies at school.

When Elena's cat Purrcy goes missing Zick promises to help her find him and while they are looking for him they suspect a bigger scandal is going on in the heart of Oldmill Village. Naturally, they set out to find out if it is true or not!

This is the first part of four in an ongoing series and would be a great starter comic for any youngster taking their first foray into the medium.

Author: Thomas Sargent | **Twitter:** @nousrembobinons

Viz at 40



The year 2019 marks the 40th birthday of Viz, Britain's premier adult comic.

Imagine. That's forty years of strips like Roger Mellie: The Man on the Telly ("Hello, good evening and bollocks"), Roger Irrelevant ("He's Completely Hatstand"), Finbarr Saunders and his Double Entendres ("Fnarr fnarr!"), the Fat Slags, Sid the Sexist, Major Misunderstanding, Miss Brady: Old Lady, Sid the Sexist ("Tyneside's Silver Tongued Cavalier"), Biffa Bacon, Student Grant, Cockney Wanker ("Orwight Darlin'!"). Billy The Fish, Buster Gonad and his Unfeasibly Large Testicles and many more.

Every Viz reader has their favourite moments. Some prefer the simple humour of the short cartoons, for example: "My bike's got a flat Vic." "Really? Whereabouts is it living?", early examples of which were once compiled into a book called "Crap Jokes." Others prefer the controlled lunacy of long running strips like Victorian Dad, starring a 19th century penny farthing riding patriarch inexplicably attached to a modern family. A puritanical hypocrite, he is helplessly aroused by exposed table legs ("That is the devil's table! It's curved legs are bare and are exciting me in carnal ways! Cover them quickly with stout hessian…"). The latest Viz annual, The Pieman's Wig, meanwhile, features Tiny Cox, in which TV's Professor Brian Cox is shrunk to miniscule proportions by a freak particle accelerator accident, the further adventures of Morris Day: Sexual Pervert, a parody of Fifty Shades of Grey: Fifty Shades of Tray (and Sam) aka The Fat Slags and an episode of Major Misunderstanding, in which the elderly gentleman takes offence at being offered a "flu jab" which he assumes is an Islamic item of dress. In short, it is at 220 pages, a "hair-raising weave of the best bits from issues 252-261" as it says on the cover.

Viz's origins are humble. "It began in 1979, when Chris (Donald) was working at the DHSS Overseas Branch in Newcastle," recalls current Viz writer and artist, Simon Thorp. "They printed 150 copies of the first issue, although it was later re-printed, so if you see a copy for sale, be very careful… However, it was rubbish. If you actually read it, you will be genuinely amazed there was ever an issue 2." Today, Viz is well on its way to its 300th issue.

Chris Donald – still a teenager in 1979 – initially produced Viz out of his bedroom in his parents' Jesmond home, helped only by his brother Simon and to a lesser extent by his friend, Jim Brownlow. Things had barely advanced when Graham Dury and Simon Thorp joined the team a few years later.

"I was at university, doing Visual Art at Aberystwyth, painting, and drawing bits and bobs for the college newspaper," Simon Thorp remembers. "There was an advert in the back of Private Eye that Chris Donald had placed. It said something along the lines of 'Bum rates paid by big magazine for funny cartoons', and it sounded suitably low rent so I wrote off and he sent me a copy of Viz issue 12. Viz had been going - somewhat fitfully - for about six years then, and was selling a few thousand an issue, mainly in Newcastle. He had secured a publishing deal with this unbelievably posh bloke called John Brown and was going to have to start producing one magazine every two months. After a year of my doing bits and pieces for Viz and Oink! Mainly, Chris offered me and Graham Dury (a botanist from Nottingham) full-time jobs up in Newcastle. "

Author: Chris Hallam | **Twitter:** @Moviebore

The next few years would see Viz become a phenomenal success. By the end of the Eighties, Viz was literally one of the best-selling magazines in the UK. A TV cartoon series of Billy the Fish was produced, with Harry Enfield voicing the celebrated half-man, half fish football player. Simon Thorp remembers the sudden upturn in the comic's fortunes.

"When I started full time, the comic was selling a few thousand an issue and there were four of us sat at drawing boards in Chris's old bedroom in his mum and dad's house," he says. "Then, a couple of years later, Viz was selling more than a million and there were still four of us sat at drawing boards, although we were now in a smallish office opposite a bus depot… The four of us - Chris, Simon, Graham and me - then worked together on the comic for about ten years, until Chris went mad and left to devote himself to his model railway. Now it's just me and Graham sat in a shed in Graham's garden, writing stuff. We draw on Wacom tablets now - the big 27" ones, because our eyesight isn't what it was."

Forty years is a long time, but celebrations seem likely to remain small scale according to Simon Thorp. "For some reason, we were talked into a big celebrity-studded party at London's swanky Cafe de Paris to celebrate Viz's 25th birthday," he says. "Jodie Kidd, Boris Johnson and Jeremy Clarkson all turned up, so we'll definitely not be doing that again". That said, he concedes, "The new Profanisaurus - War and Piss - has just come out. It's got more words in it than the entire Lord of the Rings trilogy, believe it or not." The latest edition of Roger Mellie's very own book of rude words "an epic romp through the foulest sewers of the English language" is indeed now a substantial volume having swelled over the years to almost unfeasible proportions.

The future for Viz looks bright. The only sad thing is that Viz has now long outlasted so many of the classic British comics which the title was parodying in the first place. The Seventies is an era which Viz's Simon Thorp retains fond memories of. "My mate Steve had a big pile of comics - the Beano, Dandy, Beezer, Whizzer and Chips, that sort of stuff, and we used to read them over and over again… I remember buying the first issues of Cor!! and Shiver and Shake in Pontefract WH Smiths. If only I'd kept them," he muses sadly. "They'd be worth several pounds by now."







IRON DYNASTIES BOOK I

COLLECTING IRON WOLF ISSUES 1-4

IRON DYNASTIES BOOK ONE TAKES IN THE FIRST FOUR ISSUES OF AN EPIC TALE CENTERED AROUND LYCAN KING IRON WOLF, IN HIS QUEST TO UNITE THE WORLD IN A JUST AND FAIR SENATE. SWORD AND SORCERY TALES FILLED WITH ACTION AND POLITICAL INTRIGUE.

This four-issue story arc tells the story of Lycan king Iron Wolf and his epic journey south to recruit the Neanderthal to a senate that he has set up in the hope of uniting the world's races.

Iron Wolf has married an Elf queen and together they rule over the surrounding lands. War plagued the term of Iron Wolf's father, a monarch who has mysteriously vanished without a trace. In the hope of brining the world's races together in understanding, Iron Wolf has created a senate where all groups are welcome to join. Ogres, Goblins and Elves are among those included in this union.

One group who isn't a part of the senate are the Neanderthals, his father's old enemies. He must journey south in the hope of recruiting them, but his journey will not be easy. Iron Wolf will be faced with brigands and hostile tribes from the south. Not only that but back home in the Elf kingdom a priesthood known as the Brotherhood of The Bat plot Iron Wolf's demise and would like nothing more than see the just king removed from power.

Iron Dynasty Comics produces sword and sorcery tales, set in an original world. Expect more adventures in the future. This is only the beginning!

Cover artist:	Gary Erskine
Story and pencils:	Barry Lumsden
Inks:	Jasen Tveit
Colour:	Steven Denton
Lettering:	Nikki Foxrobot

Battle commences on Kickstarter 17th of January 2020.

KICKSTARTER

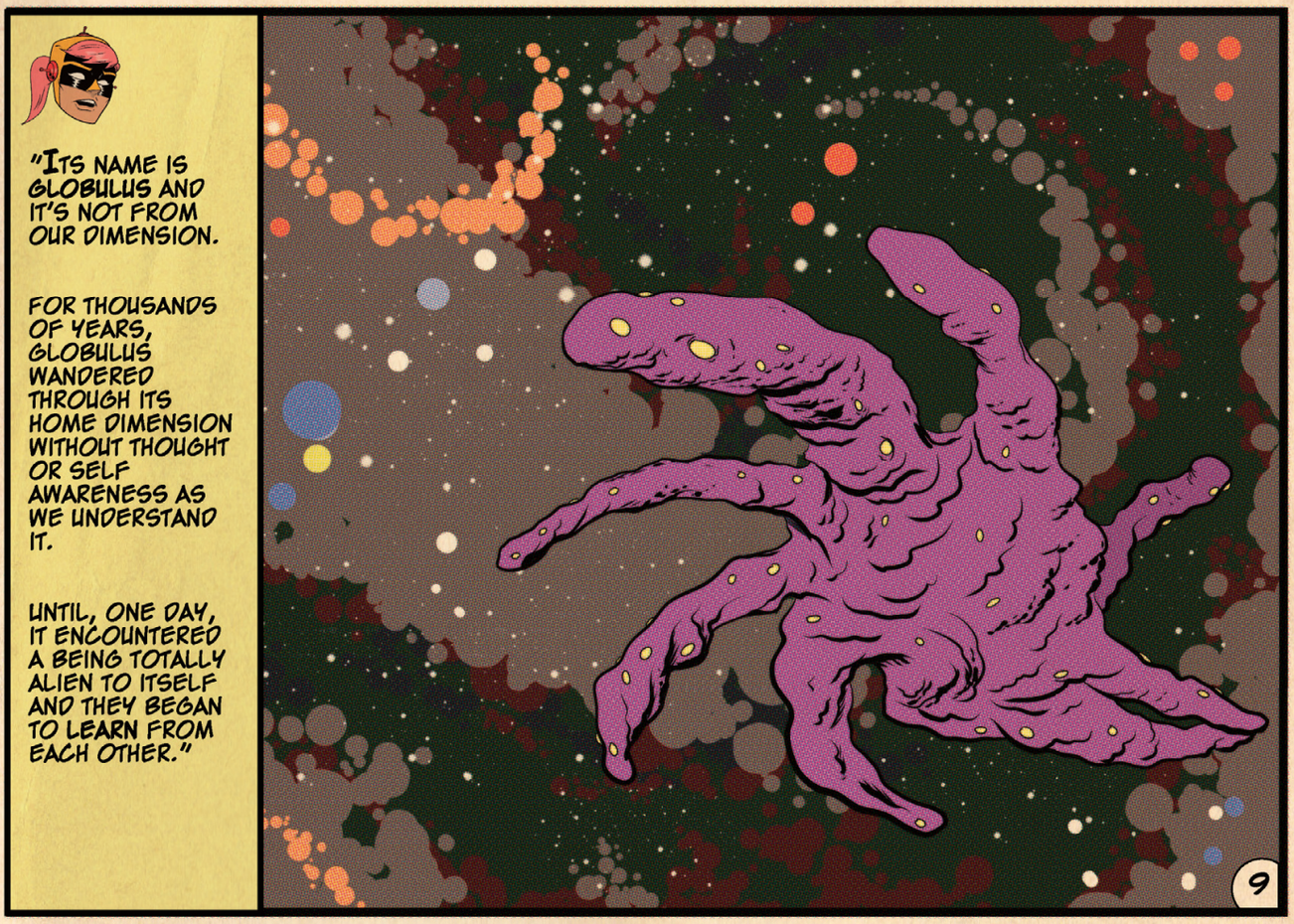
www.irondynastycomics.com


URGGHHH, KID, YOU'VE GOT TO SNAP OUT OF IT!
RAISING (URGH) COSMIC SHIELD!
Captian Cosmic. Continued from Issue 10...
FWZZZZ!!
I HAVE TO DO SOMETHING, BEFORE MY COSMIC SHIELDS ARE DRAINED!
BUT I CAN'T RISK HURTING ANY OF THESE POOR SOULS!
MEANWHILE, WATCHING HIDDEN FROM ON HIGH.
ZAP!
6


ARRGHHH!
ZAP!
ZAP!
ZAP!
ZAP!
ZAP!
I'VE GOT YOU.
THAT STRANGE RAY BEAM SEEMS TO HAVE FREED KID, BUT NOT THOSE OTHERS. ALTHOUGH IT HAS SCARED THEM OFF.
HEY!
COME WITH US! QUICKLY, BEFORE THEY COME BACK!
WHAT IN THE WORLDS IS GOING ON HERE?!
NO TIME NOW, COME ON!
TYSON! IN HERE!
CLOSE THE DOOR, QUICKLY!


LATER ON, IN AN OFF THE GRID BUNKER.
YOU'RE A WELCOME SIGHT, CAPTAIN COSMIC. WE WERE BEGINNING TO LOSE HOPE.
WE USE THE DELTA RAY TO KEEP THEM AT BAY, WHEN WE GO OUT FOR SUPPLIES.
IT ONLY FREED YOUR COMPANION BECAUSE HER EXPOSURE WAS SO BRIEF.
WHAT CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT THE INVADERS?
NOT MUCH AT ALL. IT HAPPENED SO FAST.
IT'S BEEN A NIGHTMARE.
I SEE. ARE THERE ANY MORE OF YOUR PEOPLE UNAFFECTED?
NO, WE'RE ALL THAT'S LEFT.
8


HEY, WHAT DID I MISS?
OH NOTHING TOO EXCITING. WHAT DO YOU REMEMBER? CAN YOU TELL US ANYTHING?
I CAN TELL YOU EVERYTHING.
THEY'RE NOT SEPARATE BEINGS, BUT PARTS OF A WHOLE AND I WAS LINKED TO IT.
IN THAT BRIEF TIME, I LEARNED EVERYTHING ABOUT THE CREATURE.


"ITS NAME IS GLOBULUS AND IT'S NOT FROM OUR DIMENSION.
FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS, GLOBULUS WANDERED THROUGH ITS HOME DIMENSION WITHOUT THOUGHT OR SELF AWARENESS AS WE UNDERSTAND IT.
UNTIL, ONE DAY, IT ENCOUNTERED A BEING TOTALLY ALIEN TO ITSELF AND THEY BEGAN TO LEARN FROM EACH OTHER."
9


"NOT LONG AFTER, IT FOUND A WAY INTO OUR DIMENSION WHERE, WITHOUT ANY WARNING, IT RAINED DOWN ON THIS WORLD..."


"...AND BEGAN TO ABSORB THE MINDS OF ALL THE PEOPLE IT COULD FIND. TO BRING THEM INTO ITS UNITY.."


"BUT THIS WAS JUST THE FIRST STAGE. HE PLANS FOR GLOBULUS TO SPREAD OUT, LIKE A VIRUS, UNTIL ALL ARE UNIFIED UNDER HIS RULE."
"HE?"


IT'S NOT THEM. THEY HAVE NO REAL IDEA WHAT HURT THEIR ACTIONS ARE CAUSING. IT'S THE ONE WHO'S BIDDING THEY OBEY.
WHO COULD POSSIBLY CONTROL THIS THING?!
USING HER COSMIC POWERS, KID PROJECTS A MENTAL IMAGE ONTO A NEAR BY MONITOR.
SKELETRON!
WHO IS SKELETRON?
HE IS A WARLORD FROM THE ORION CLUSTER. A BRUTAL ONE AT THAT.
To be Continued...

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THE STATE OF INDEPENDENTS

The UK's independent and small press comics scene has never been more exciting. We bring you a look at some of the best!

"It's the Glastonbury of comics, with a real emphasis on creators"

Alex Thomas looks back at the **Thought Bubble Comic Festival 2019**

The Thought Bubble Comic Festival is the highlight of the comic convention calendar. It's the Glastonbury of comics, with an emphasis on creators rather than cosplay and celebrities. As such we have dedicated this month's section to this mammoth event with reviews of debuting books and interviews with creators we met. But first, let's take a look at what happened at this year's show:

This years Thought Bubble festival saw it move from its traditional home of Leeds to the picturesque spa town of Harrogate. Arriving at the Harrogate Conference centre on the Saturday there was no concern about a lack of punters for this new venue, as the 4 deep queue that snaked around the building clearly meant these comic fans were not going to be put off by recent flooding and transport problems in the area.

As we entered the main ComiXology hall we were hit by the sheer scale of the venue and the convention as a whole. With four rows of tables and decent sized aisles for people to move around in, the hall was packed and was buzzing with excitement even before those queuing had been let in. Doing



a lap to get our bearings was not easy. Not only did we keep bumping into familiar faces but the venue was just huge and after getting our bearings in one hall we realised this was just one of three that make up the show!

Comics, comics, everywhere!

Because of the linear nature of the centre, as the event doors opened up fans and started to filter in those in the ComiXology hall had first pick of the eager fans - especially the Etherington Brothers who were front and centre – and so it was quite quiet in the other halls for most of the morning. However, creators like Andy Conduit Turner told us this wasn't stopping people from buying and he'd had a few early sales!

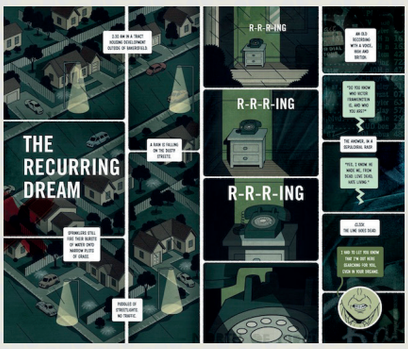
During the day we caught with so many fantastic creators that we can't mention them all here (read our full report at **pipedreamcomics.co.uk/show-report-thought-bubble-2019/**) and keep reading to see some of the great books we found and creators we were able to interview.

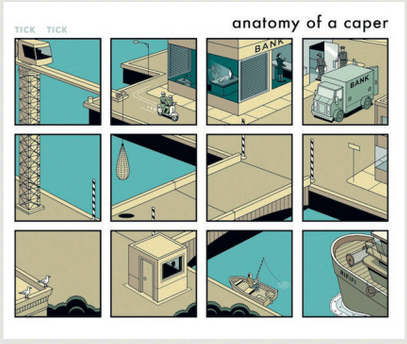
As we headed back to our hotel exhausted and our bag bulging with great new comics, we reflected on what a fantastic day it had been. With events going on that evening, and all day on the Sunday as well, we had barely scratched the surface of what was on offer at this fantastic show. There were dozens of creators we had not been to see properly and many we didn't even find (we just saw them posting on Twitter and Instagram later!) There were panels which we had not been to and a glorious city which we had only had a brief glimpse of.

A comic convention can be made or broken by its location, and so we hope that this move to Harrogate is the start of a brighter bolder future for Thought Bubble. Based on what we saw at our first Thought Bubble, this was one which can only get bigger and better.

Produced in association with Pipedream Comics
For more great indie comics coverage visit **www.pipedreamcomics.co.uk**







The use of unconventional layouts and pages structures free really unique

Coin Op Comics #8

Publisher: Coin Op Books
Writer/Artist: Peter and Maria Hoey
Price: $19.95 from coinopbooks.com

One of our favourite discoveries at Thought Bubble was Peter and Maria Hoey's incredible Coin op Comics, a series which will make you look at comics in a completely new light.

Coin Op Comics #8 comes to you in a glorious hard cover format and is a collection of 4 short stories (and some beautiful musician profiles), which in this issue have the common theme of infatuation. It's an eclectic bunch, with no real obvious story or narrative, but each one feels like an exploration of the issue's theme as well as how comics are told. It's a book which straddles the twin towers of comics and art books, but with a heavy lean towards the latter. It reminded us a lot of Daniel Clowes in terms of it's style and it's esoteric outlook, but it also feels like something quite contemporary like Jon McNaught's Kingdom with it's ambitious use of panels and design.

Opening chapter Rear View Mirror sees recurring characters Saltz and Pepz retelling the Orpheus and Eurydice story, but with the back drop of a 30s Art Deco Jazz cartoon. The second, is a strange rambling story about a recurring dream and is told using panels that run from top to bottom as well as left to right which gives the story a disorientating pattern that goes with the dreamlike theme. Perhaps our favourite of the bunch is Intersection, which is a really smart 'what if' story that follows a man who wishes he had met his wife earlier in life – but when he is given the chance to do that it sees his life take a very different turn to the one he had hoped for. The final story Anatomy of a Caper is perhaps the most conceptually ambitious, but also the most esoteric. It is a simple story of a bank heist told across 4 pages where a single image is spilt into 12 panels. The framing then stays the same and the caper plays out within the panels of the page. It's a really clever idea and works perfectly for a simple story like this.

"A wonderfully clever and original read, that is very carefully considered and compiled"

Overall, Coin Op Comics is a wonderfully clever and original read, that is very carefully considered and compiled. The use of unconventional layouts and storytelling techniques is incredibly slick and the high stylised artwork, which varies subtly from story to story, works seamlessly within each page. At nearly $20 plus shipping for UK readers it is not the cheapest of reads, but it is well worth it if you can find a copy.

(Try Gosh Comics for issue #8 or get an anthology of previous issues that is available on Amazon).

"I hope the reader will gain some enlightenment into how it feels to be in a crisis."

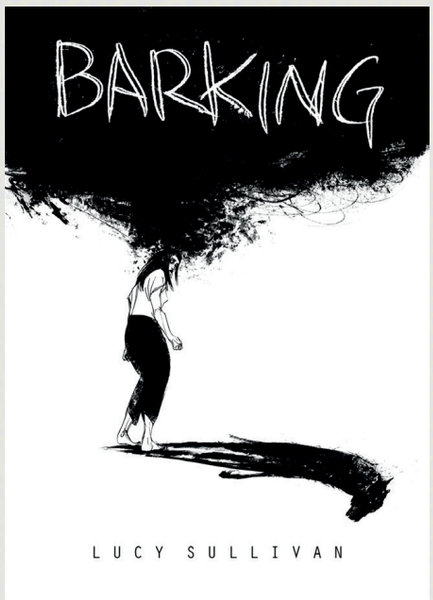
Lucy Sullivan on the importance of mental health in **Barking**

Part of the growing collection of exciting books being released on the Unbound platform, Lucy Sullivan's Barking is a powerful look at a mental health crisis. We caught up with her to find out more.

Barking feels like a very personal story, is it based on your own experiences or people you know?
Lucy Sullivan: It's a combination. I had a mental health crisis in my 20s after my dad died suddenly. It wasn't clear that was what was happening to me at the time and it took a catastrophic night out for it to become clear and I got help.

When I subsequently saw friends go through a similar ordeal, but they were also sectioned, it threw a sharp light on the persisting stigma around our minds and how we, as a society treat someone in that vulnerable, terrifying state.

Was it important for you to create a book which challenged rather than being a passive reading experience?
LS: The most important aspect was being honest and true to my research. I didn't intend for it to be challenging but I guess that's the nature of the topic. I did want it to feel frightening in places as that is true to the experience. I drew a lot of reference from film and TV influences such as American Werewolf in London, Dark Water and Poppy Shakespeare TV drama. There's also a fair amount of mythology & psychological theory in the mix. I hope that will make it more entertaining too but definitely in a darker way. Mostly I hope that the reader will empathise with Alix and go with her through the process and gain some enlightenment into how it feels to be in a crisis. The only real way to break the stigma is to talk openly about these topics.





Lucy's unique appraoch to her artwork helps to reflect the chaotic nature of the story

You have a very unique art technique, can you tell us a bit about it?
LS: I came to comics from Hand-drawn Animation and a career teaching observational drawing. Both are definitely present in my artwork. I spent years developing the style of the book, working on it around my other jobs. I knew it had to feel both urgent and visceral so I drew the whole book with a biro or on carbon typewriter sheets. The materials themselves are messy and unruly but produce beautiful lines so felt very apt to the subject.

If you could offer any advice to anyone going through a mental health crisis what would that be?
LS: Tell someone. Anyone you can feel able to do so. Saying it out loud is the first step and the most powerful. You never know who might be able to help. There lare lots of excellent, free services that will point you in the right direction for help such as Mind, The Samaritans or Rethink Mental Illness.

You can find out more about Barking at unbound.com/books/barking/

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Glorious Wrestling Alliance: Premium Edition

Publisher: Josh Hicks
Writer/Artist: Josh Hicks
Price: £12 from www.cpebooks.co.uk

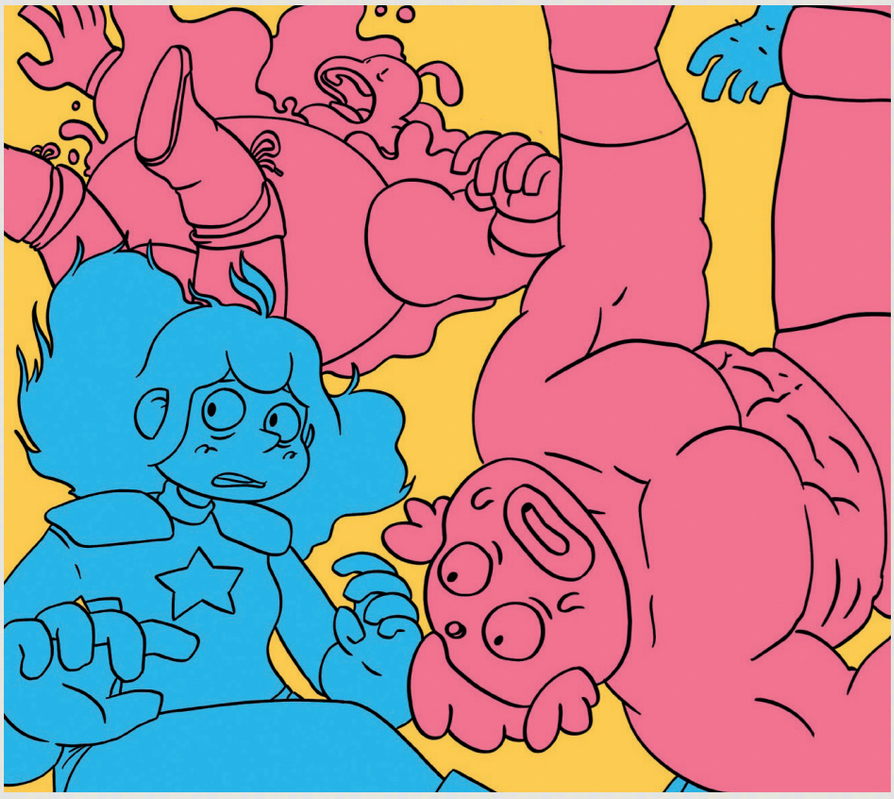
If you thought you had seen it all in the over the top world of professional wrestling, then think again. Josh Hick's stellar series takes the antics of a bunch 80s pro wrestlers and gives them a quirky small press makeover.

The heroes in GWA are not your usual muscled up stereotypes, instead you get character like Carpman (a fish based fighter who is plagued with guilt about his position on the card); Death Machine (a bruising heavyweight who also writes poetry); and the human gravy boat, who is constantly trying to make it big despite his obvious flaws!

While Josh brings his love and passion for pro wrestling to the project, he also brings a gloriously surreal sense of humour to it as well. Each chapter is based loosely on a wrestling concept - the supercard, the tour bus and the struggling business - but really each chapter is a series of character based skits where Hicks gets to riff on the weird world he has created. As well as telling some genuinely enjoyable stories too.

His artwork is gloriously simple yet effortlessly cool. His cartoonish style gives the characters the perfect look for over the top wrestlers but also means they can happily co-exist in a world where a fish-man is the champ! Meanwhile his smart panel designs (such as the tour bus in chapter two) give it all a very smartly designed feel.

While you don't have to be a wrestling fan to enjoy GWA, if you are then it is packed full of obscure references and subtle in jokes. But don't worry, it's not all there is to this book. GWA is a champion example of how to make a truly heavyweight wrestling comic!





Zoot! #3

Publisher: Hotel Fred Press
Writer/Artist: Roger Langridge
Price: £5 from hotelfred.bigcartel.com

Roger Langridge's annual anthology features his characters Fred the Clown, McGonnagal the Worlds Worst Poet, Art D'Ecco and the Hump and the Fez in a rip roaring collection of laugh out loud strips that mix the retro styling of The Chap and the anarchic humour of Viz.

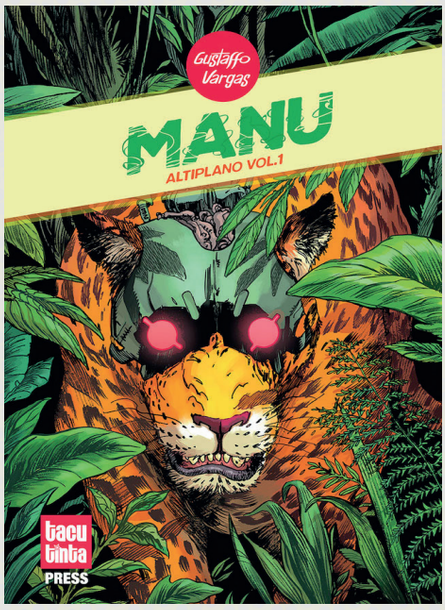
This new selection of stories feels like a glorious statement of intent from one of our new favourite creators.It has hints of the anarchic spirit of Ken Reid, the immaculate simplicity of Bill Watterson, and the pulp sensibilities of Nick Prolix. Meanwhile the humour ranges from the smart to the surreal to just down right nutty. Art D'Ecco and The Hump get caught in a party full of smiling butlers, while McGonagal relives the moment he was stitched up by a theatre impresaario, and then the Fez… well, he just does what he does!

The whole thing is framed by scenes involving an insomniac Roger struggling getting ideas for stories which introduces each chapter. It gives the issue a fantastic structure, and allows Roger the chance to pause for breath between the outrageous antics of his main characters.

"Details are what gives that extra bit to your world building and gives them a spicy plausibility"

Gustaffo Vargas on creating cyborg jungle creatures for **MANU**

We checked out Gustaffo varga's awesome Peruvian sci-fi threiller Manu last issue, but at Thought Bubble we caught up with it's creator to find out more about it's creation:





Gustaffo's unique world in Manu was inspired by the cultrual heritage of his native Peru

Can you tell us a bit about the inspiration and story behind MANU

Gustaffo Vargas: By the beginning of 2014 I wanted to tell a science fiction story based in PERU. Then I realised I wanted to make a cyberpunk story, and as soon as I decided what elements I wanted to use the place where it would happen came to me rapidly (Trujillø).

The idea of making books that happen in real places came naturally. So the next story after Trujillø was L1MA, which is the capital city, my city. This was a new story, the only thing I knew in the beginning was, I want to tell a story with street kids (pirañas), black vultures that happens in Lima. It is a love letter to my city, in my own way. L1MA was released in Thought Bubble 2018.

Following that came MANU, which is not a city, but is a geographic area, a National Park in the Peruvian Rainforest. MANU is volume 1 of 3 of the ALTIPLANO saga, it explores some themes I started working already in L1MA.

All my stories happen in the same world, so little by little, characters and elements connect or cross paths more.

What inspired you to mix sci fi and South American jungles together?

GV: I wanted to explore what I knew and where I came from, go deeper in my own culture, I think it's a territory that is so rich! In Anime you have really varied stories and they use their culture and folklore in very different and creative ways. The ideas and visuals are amazingly rich and that's when it hit me. In Peru (and all South America) we have such rich and fascinating cultures, maybe I should explore Peru with that kind of vision.

MANU is much longer than those first two books, were there any challenges to writing a longer story?

GV: L1MA and Trujillø are fast roller coasters that go from A to B. I wanted to do a bigger and more ambitious story. It was not easy, I had to prepare a Mind Map and small events cards to make all the elements work.

Which of your characters has been your favourite to draw ?

GV: I think I have fun with almost all of them, the kids, the dogs, the vultures, the cyborgs, they all serve to tell the story. The more complex designs can be a pain, but they are worth it. The jaguar in MANU and all the monkeys were a bit of a challenge, but they were fun too. Those details are what gives that extra bit to your world building and gives them that extra spicy plausibility you're trying to achieve.

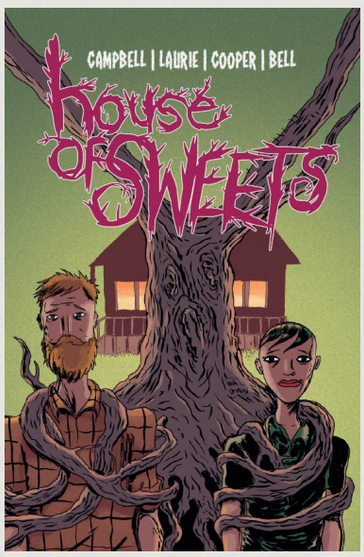
Get MANU, Trujillø and L1MA from gustaffovargas.bigcartel.com/

House of Sweets

Publisher: Cabal Comics
Writer: Fraser Campbell
Artist: Iain Laurie
Price: Coming soon to Kickstarter

Fraser Campbell and Iain Laurie's twisted revenge thriller The Edge Off was one of our highlights of last year, and this fantastic pairing have reunited for House Of Sweets.

House of Sweets has elements of The Shining, Grimm's Fairytale, Lovecraft and the Evil Dead, all in one creepy cottage. Hans and his sister Netha are heading out into the woods to find an old cabin they knew when they were kids. Hans is trying to get away and write, while his sister is trying to get away from personal troubles. Once in the cabin, past demons begin to haunt and torment them and their dark secrets return. While perhaps not as instant as The Edge Off, House of Sweets is still a gloriously dark and twisted fairytale which has a really tragic vein running through it. Campbell's use of rhyming couplets and a poetic cadence give it a dream like, fairy tale quality, which Laurie turns into a nightmare . It's not always the easiest of reads, but these two have a unique style of comic creation that is dark and unsettling, but also completely absorbing.



The Exchange #1

Publisher: Madius Comics
Writer: Mike Sambrook, Rob Jones
Artist: Liam Hill
Price: £5 from www.madiuscomics.co.uk

Joining The Incredible Bun on Madius Comics table at Thought Bubble was The Exchange. A strange and surreal tale of a cultural exchange between two teachers, that is nowhere near as dull as that might sound!

Clive is a downtrodden teacher who lives with his mother, and one night while lamenting his lack of a social life he browses the internet for a new job and is greeted with a message from the people of Old Queensdock who are looking for an exchange. Little does he know when he agrees to this, is that Old Queensdock is not your average town and it's inhabits live by the mantra of "don't act weird!" - and with good reason!

On the surface, The Exchange might not have an obvious hook – it's cover is fairly minimal and it's synopsis is deliberately vague. But that's because hiding beneath the unassuming façade is a gloriously strange and downright bonkers book.

Surreal swap shop

The opening chapters with Clive teaching feel like they have stepped out of a Todd Oliver book with its over the top characterisation and dysfunctional visuals. Whereas the residents of Old Queensdock feel like they have come from an episode of Adventure Time – if it had been drawn by Iain Laurie. They are a strange and weird bunch of misfits, but there is something sinister hiding underneath the quirkiness. It's all rendered in a glorious neon fused pink and blue colour scheme which makes the whole thing feel even more otherworldly but really eye catching and fresh at the same time.

While the visuals from newcomer Liam Hill will be the first thing you notice, the dialogue that is hiding underneath those weird images is just as funny. It has that classic



Sambrook and Jones sarcasm and surreal-ness that we have loved in Papercuts and Inkstains, and the little asides and snippets of dialgue help make the book much more than just a bunch of surreal images. It gives it that readability factor which is key to making a book like this work.

Along with the aforementioned The Incredible Bun, The Exchange feels like a real step up in quality for the Madius team – as well as an interesting new direction. They both have a real confidence to the writing and the concept, that is then allowing them to take more risks with the artwork. As a result, they are making books which feel really different and fresh and give Madius a new identity.

Both books feel very accessible and like they could be all-ages, but there is also something simmering just under the surface which means you probably shouldn't be showing it to really young kids – although we're not sure why yet!

The Exchange is a really assured and confident read from a publisher on the rise, and this is a book that will delight and baffle you in equal measures. (And when you go and get your copy from them, remember the Queensdock mantra, and don't act weird!)

SMALL PRESS SPOTLIGHT

We look at more books released at Thought Bubble 2019

The Silent Horns is the new comic from Wine and Zine's Bryony Evans and is a wonderfully potent story about coming of age and acceptance. Yfa is a young hexerei, which is a sort of horned magical creature that looks a bit like Marko from Saga. When their horns come through, the Hexerei begin to develop magical powers, but when Yfa's horns come through her powers don't appear and so she begins to question herself and why she isn't like her friends. The Silent Horns is a beautifully told coming age story, that has real heart and emotional depth to it. On the surface it is your classic puberty analogy, with the horns being representative of any number of teenage changes. Yet it feels like it could be so much more than that – especially for a teen who is looking for more – i.e. anything to do with gender or sexuality. The Silent Horns is relevant to a wide range of teen dilemmas, without ever diluting its message, and so the amount a reader gets out of it, is up to their own situation. (There is even something there for the parents, which is a lot of what we got out of the book.) As well as being a wonderfully written story, Silent Horns looks gorgeous too. Bryony's artwork is packed full of expressive characters who have a real sense of dynamism, which is no surprise considering her animation background. They are rendered in a beautiful monochrome pencil shading style which gives the story a fantastic texture that really suits the quite organic, fantasy nature of story. **Buy The Silent Horns from wineandzine.bigcartel.com**



In **Golf Girl**, our heroine Becky Jones is your average sixteen year old, balancing family life, school and a job she hates. But in Becky's case that means working at the rather tedious Golf World, which isn't ideal for someone who hates golf. Especially when she is possessed by the spirit of an alien entity who gives her golf based super powers. It also sets her on a course against the mysterious paramilitary scientists of ReaLabs. (Who aren't a gym!)

While some of this may sound all very serious, Golf Girl is a book which is played more for laughs than drama. From the first page and the debut of a recurring joke about a seagull stealing chips (to that gag about ReaLabs) it is a genuine laugh out loud read. And recurring jokes are definitely a theme: from the seagulls, to Becky's constant put downs about people who like golf. It's a wonderfully witty and frequently funny read, and one which is definitely pushed along by its characters rather than the action.



It reminded us of Giant Days and the way John Allison builds stories around dialogue and character – but also fleshes the whole thing out with unlikely side stories. In Golf Girl it's the spritegeist and ReaLabs which gives the book it's background plot, but really it's all about the characters. With so much emphasis on character, the actual narrative parts of the story (i.e the appearance of the spirtegeist and ReaLabs) feels a bit shunted to the end of the book like an after thought. However, when you have had so much quality character work, we forgive this slight imbalance.
Find out more at charty.co.uk/

The Bones of the Sea is the new book from Petrichor's Gareth A. Hopkins and continues his unique approach to comics. His mix of personal reflection and abstract images build these wonderful visual pieces which are strangely readable despite their unconventional style. This issue is built around two strands of thought: Hopkins musings on his family as he waits for his son in a car park; and also on the decaying body of a blue whale. It is the latter which seems to inform the visuals (and gives this book it's name) as the shapes Gareth has created have a flowing almost tentacle like appearance to them, as well as feeling like waves crashing on the sea, or indeed like the decaying bones of a giant sea mammal. Unlike his previous work, this perhaps gives a more immediate visual connection to the words, but that connection is not necessay to get the most out of Hopkins work. Hopkins has developed and evolved his style to be about a long term journey for his art, as much as it is about creating individual comics. However, by accident or design the images for Bones of The Sea feel like a much more coherent set when contrasted with the words – while still remaining completely unique in their approach.
Purchase Bones of the Seas for £4 at grthink.bigcartel.com/



Sequential Empathy

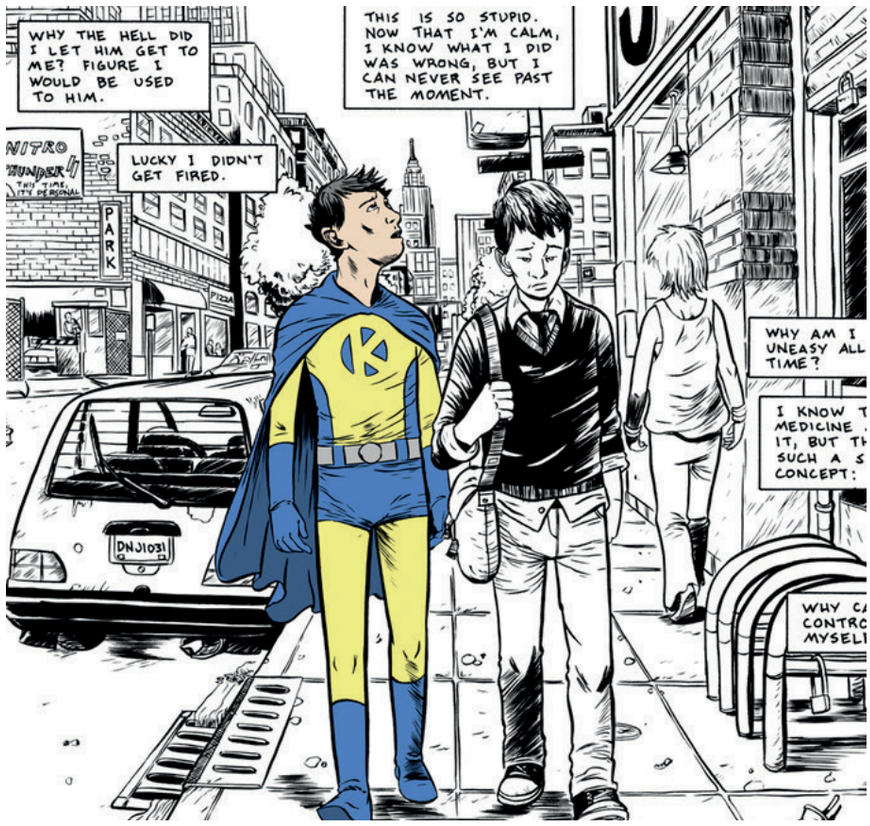
The Unflinching yet Sensitive Flourishing of Mental Health in Indie Comics: Part 2

In comparison to the slice-of-life vibes of Brain Shoodles, Worry Wart and Wired Up Wrong that we saw last issue, other indie comics with a mental health slant have an aesthetic that's as far detached from reality as possible. The War for Kaleb and Tales of the Fractured Mind reach for the skies and the stars respectively by weaving science fiction and fantasy into their mental illness depictions. By retreating from reality into fantasy, Jason Pittman, Roddy McCance and Roland Kalnins conjure up lavish and surreal explorations into mental illness, distinct from Emily, Rachael and Dani's works.

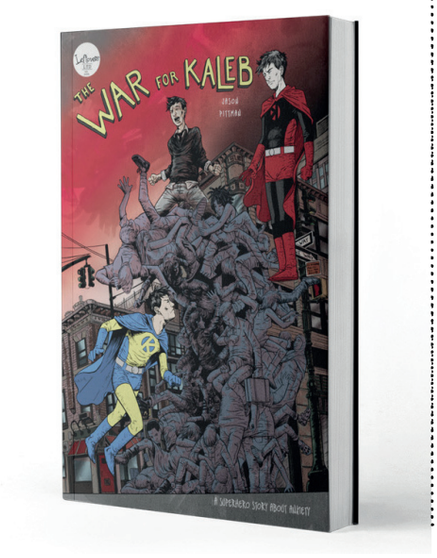
Anxious Superheroes

The War for Kaleb by writer & artist Jason Pittman is a rather deliberate attempt at communicating with his own demons. The three-issue series, now available as a collected trade paperback, follows the aforementioned Kaleb as his feelings of severe anxiety manifest into a duo of super-powered beings, one heroic and one evil, and proceed to clash with each other. "After failed attempts at helping myself, and my anxiety, I went to looking for answers through art, and storytelling, by translating those images in my head to paper," explains Pittman. "Years later, I have The War for Kaleb."

The War for Kaleb liberally exploits the panel structure of a comic to show the overwrought feelings anxiety can bring. Its near-total black-and-white appearance feels stripped back and impactful, rather than unfinished and cold, assisted by Pittman's intensely detailed illustrations of characters, landscapes and architecture. The manifestations themselves are the only points in the comic where colour is used to illustrate them. As the only points of colours in the book, they instantly catch the reader's eye, highlighting the tangible grip anxiety can have. "Once bouts of anxiety come, and settle in, there are very few things to convince myself that everything was okay. It was like something took over to make me a different person, and I couldn't listen to my regular self anymore. It isn't bipolar, though. Because there is always something in the back of my mind wanting to stop, but it just doesn't." That attention to detail in The War for Kaleb's visuals feels like a tense, underlying reflection of the anxiety Kaleb experiences throughout the story. Whether such



The War For Kaleb uses colour and black and white to show it's character's mental state

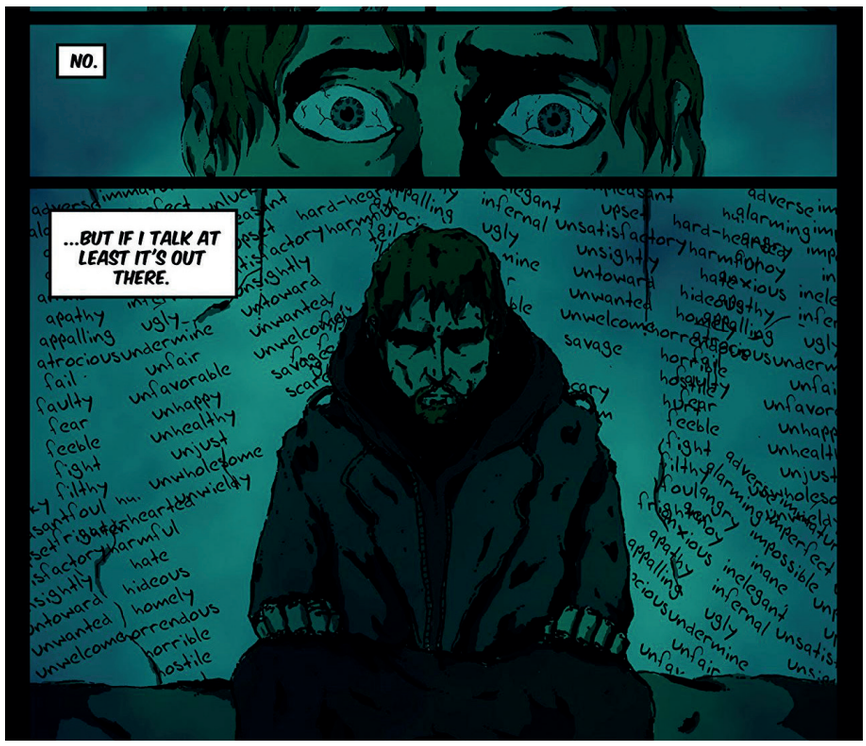


an observation is genuine or not, it still points to The War for Kaleb is a rich, robust likeness of anxiety and depression, visually and narratively.

Fractured Minds

By comparison, Tales of the Fractured Mind adopts a monsoon-esque set of visual moods and stretches beyond depictions of anxiety and depression. Each of the anthology's seven strips covers a specific mental illness, including bi-polar disorder and dementia. Roddy and Rolands task themselves with no easy mission of giving a visual voice to numerous complicated illnesses, yet several strips succeed in harnessing the raw mental state of these illnesses. 'Clock of the World' makes use of split panels to illustrate dual personalities. 'War on Reality' gives a sparse relationship between language and shape, often featuring speech separate from the visuals, as if they're illustrating post-traumatic stress by highlighting the soldier's separation between reality and themselves. The neon-soaked colours of 'Mountaineering' feels like a less-than-subtle comment on the jungle-wading attitude to making sense of gender dysphoria.

"I felt like it was important to include many different sides of mental illness, that's why each story is different," explains Roddy. "Each story is like a 4 minute song. They are short and sharp and there to pick you up, make you understand something or to just make you feel something." Rolands brings a swarming, nightmare-ish vibe to the anthology, a style that haunts and engulf the comic's strips; "Depicting the illnesses wasn't too hard in the design sense, but taking those stories and drawing the pages... I had to go into a special mental state for each of them. Because I tried to put myself into each of those situations presented. It took a toll on me emotionally. Sounds a bit sad or morbid but it was an amazing experience. So each of those stories has a piece of 'Me' in them." An intimate unboxing for such a sweeping collection of ideas and illnesses. Even with Tales of the Fractured Mind's sense of scale separating it from Rachael's or Emily's works, we find ourselves slipping back to the mentality of Wired Up Wrong and Brain Shoodles; the idea of placing the creator firmly into the DNA of the comic, no matter how far-flung the story itself may be.



Roddy McCance's anthology gives a visual voice to a number of complex conditions

> "THEIR EXUBERANT ATTITUDE IN UTILISING OTHER-WORLDLY CONCEPTS TEARS DOWN THE TOXIC MISCONCEPTIONS"

What still makes The War for Kaleb and Tales of the Fractured Mind distinct from past works and compatible with each other is their exuberant attitude in utilising other-worldly concepts to tear down the toxic misconceptions around mental illnesses. It's less of a mask, more of a platform to emphasis the pain felt by having these illnesses, giving them a tangibility that allows for a piercing clawing at the reader.

Next month: Mental Health Zines





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