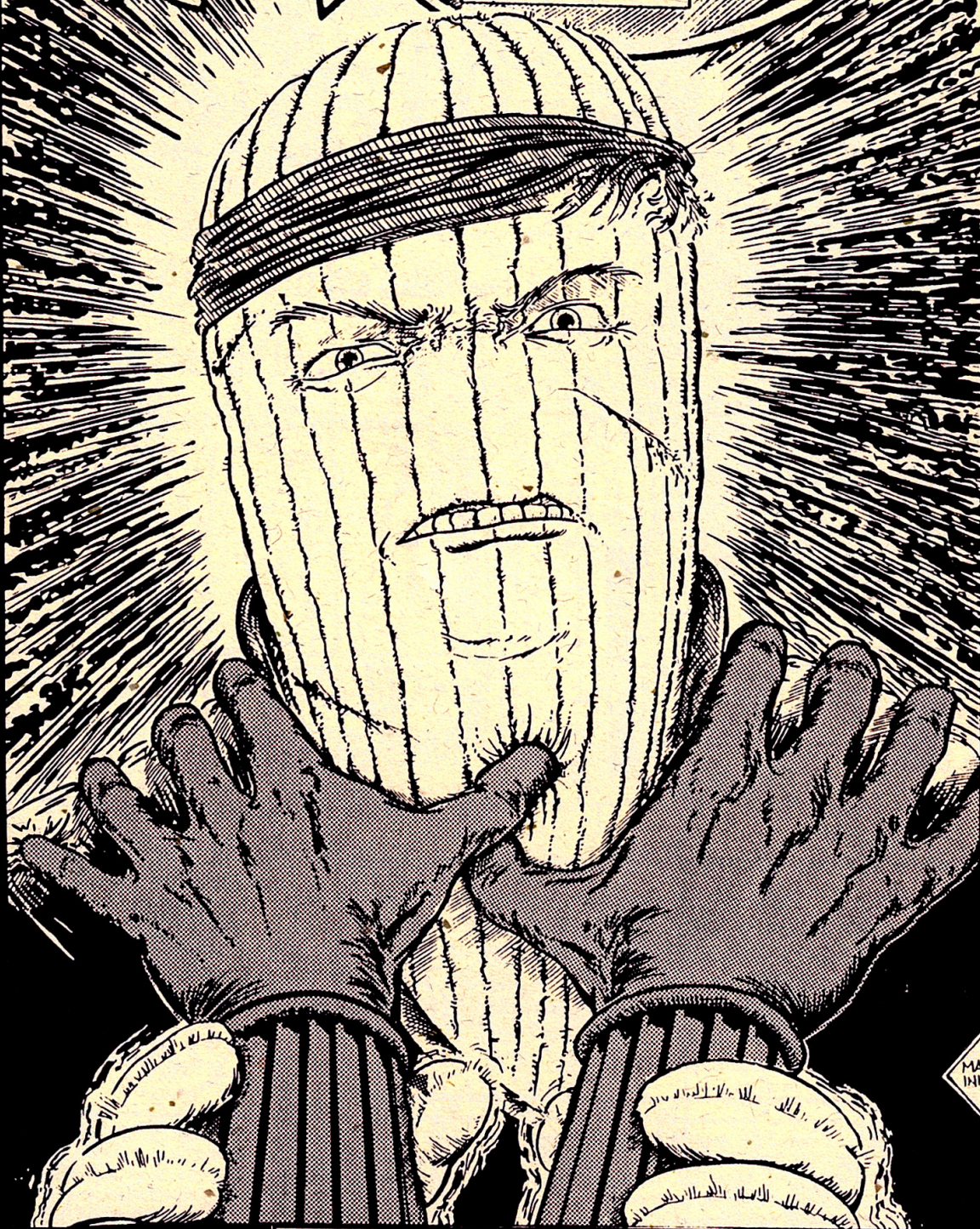


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ADVENTURES™



MAX 89
INK 13
96

THE DARK AGES • 4 OF 8

PROTOPLASM PRESS • \$2.00 U.S. \$2.50 CAN • AUGUST 1996

AMOEBA ADVENTURES #23

THE DARK AGES

PART FOUR: Malice.



Written and created by Nik Dirga

Pencils, inks and letters by Max Ink

Cacography Consultant: Ann Bostic

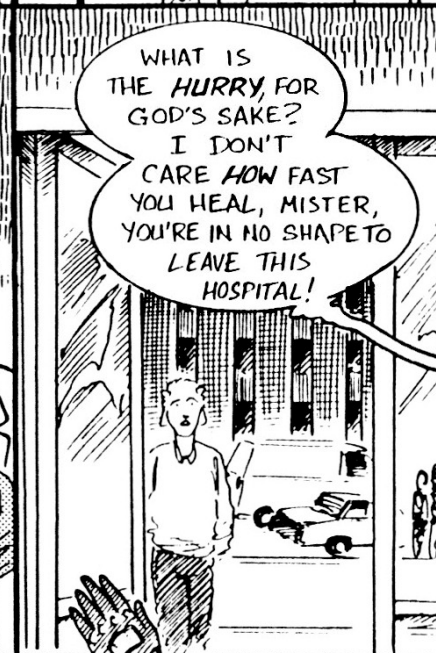
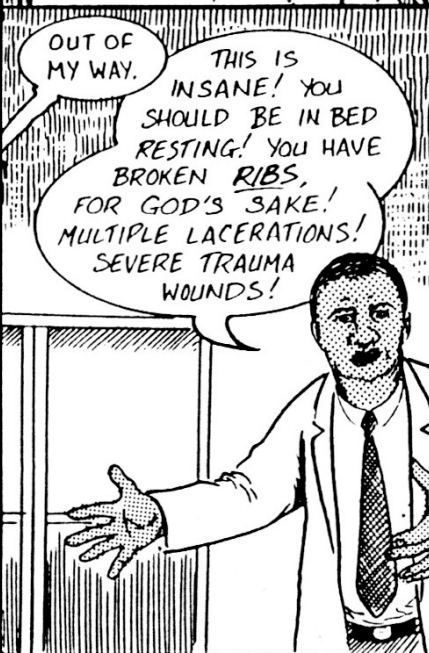
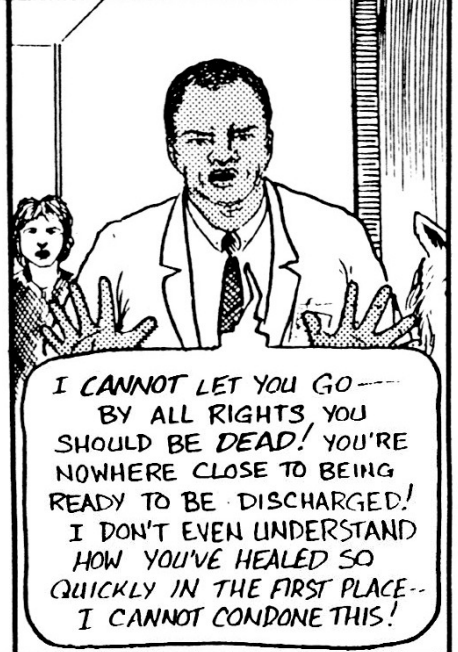
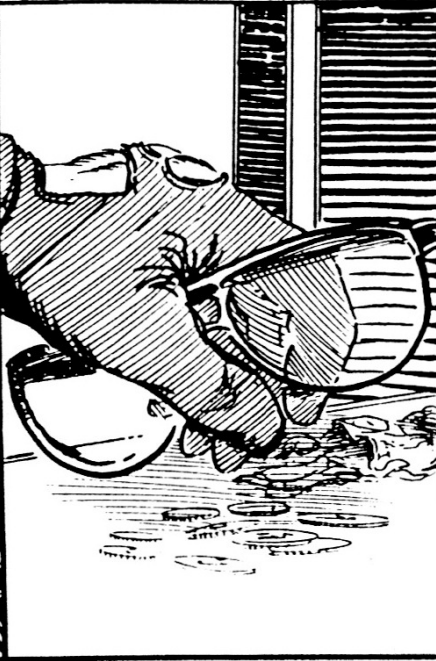
"All through the town
tonight are folks lie dying."
—Cormac McCarthy, *Suttree*

Previously: The enigmatic Dark One's campaign of terror against the heroes of the All-Spongy Squadron continues. Both Rambunny and Dawn Star have been felled and horribly wounded by his attacks, and Prometheus remains missing. Only Karate Kactus, Spif and Ninja Ant have been left to pick up the pieces, as they begin to realize the nature of the mysterious forces in conspiracy against them...

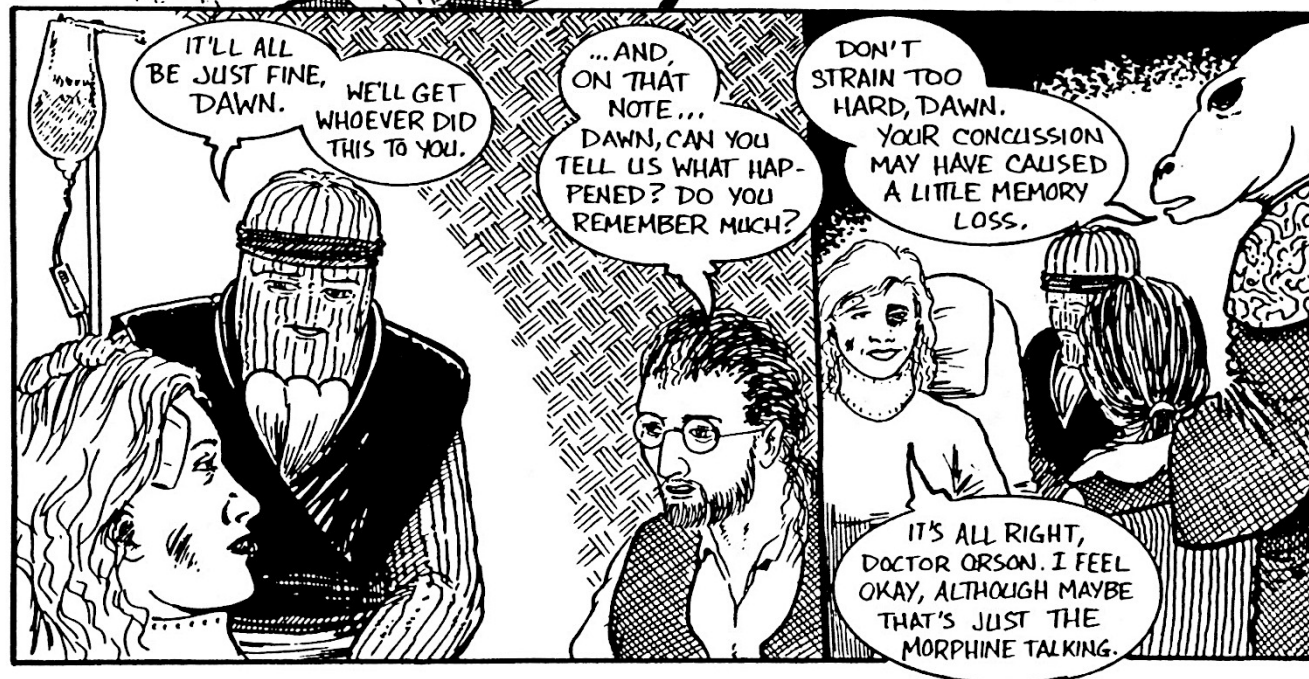
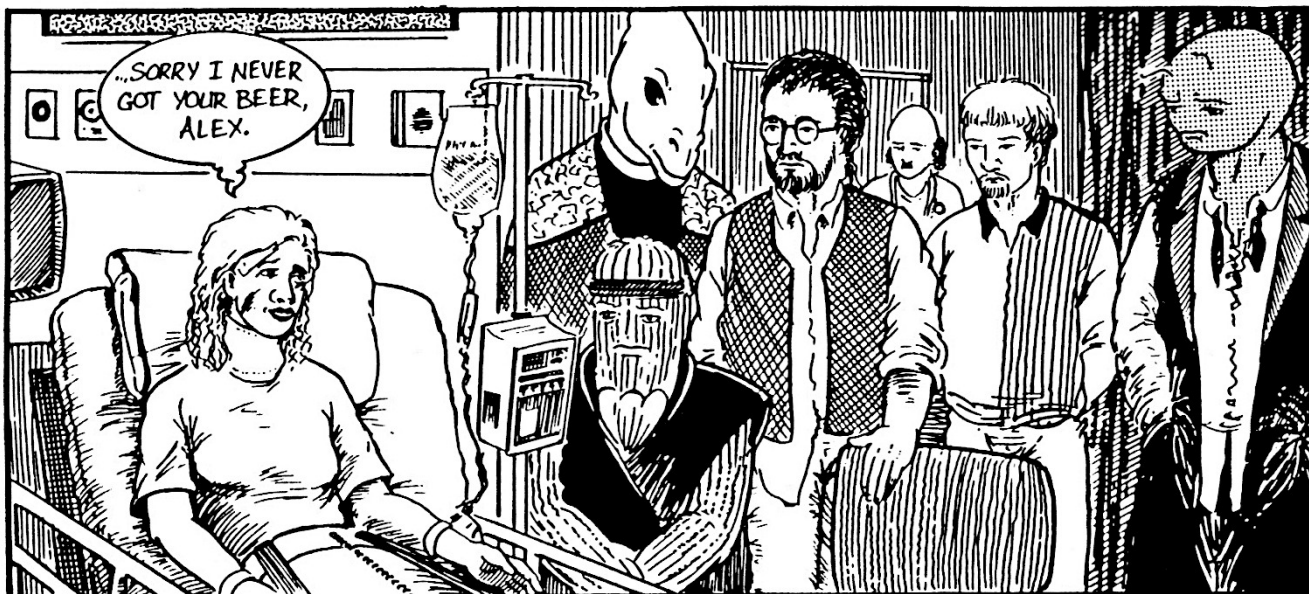
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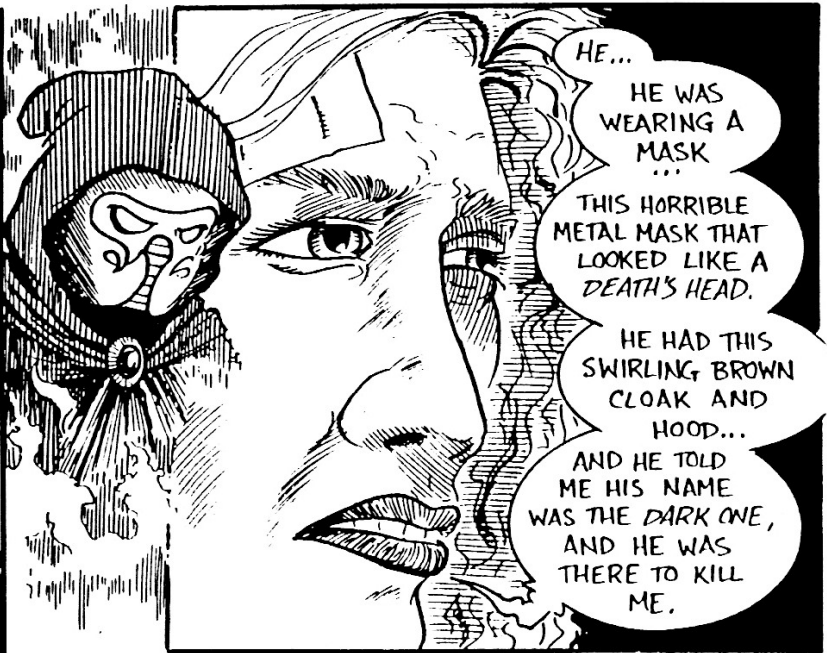




I REMEMBER
FLYING DOWN TO
THE QUIK-E MART
FOR ALEX'S BEER
...

AND WHEN
I CAME OUT, THERE
WAS SOMEONE
WAITING THERE
FOR ME.

WHO WAS
WAITING?



HE...

HE WAS
WEARING A
MASK
...

THIS HORRIBLE
METAL MASK THAT
LOOKED LIKE A
DEATH'S HEAD.

HE HAD THIS
SWIRLING BROWN
CLOAK AND
HOOD...

AND HE TOLD
ME HIS NAME
WAS THE DARK ONE,
AND HE WAS
THERE TO KILL
ME.



WHAT
DID HE DO
NEXT?



NEXT?

HE BEAT
ME, SPIF.

HE BEAT ME
EASILY AND DECISIVELY.
I DIDN'T STAND A
CHANCE -- HE WAS
LIKE SOME NATURAL
FORCE.

HE BEAT
ME... AND WELL,
HERE I AM.



"DARK ONE?"
I DON'T KNOW ANY
DARK ONE! WHAT'S
HIS BEEF WITH
US?

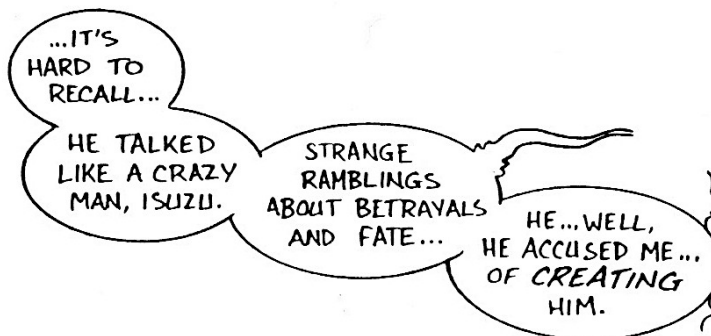
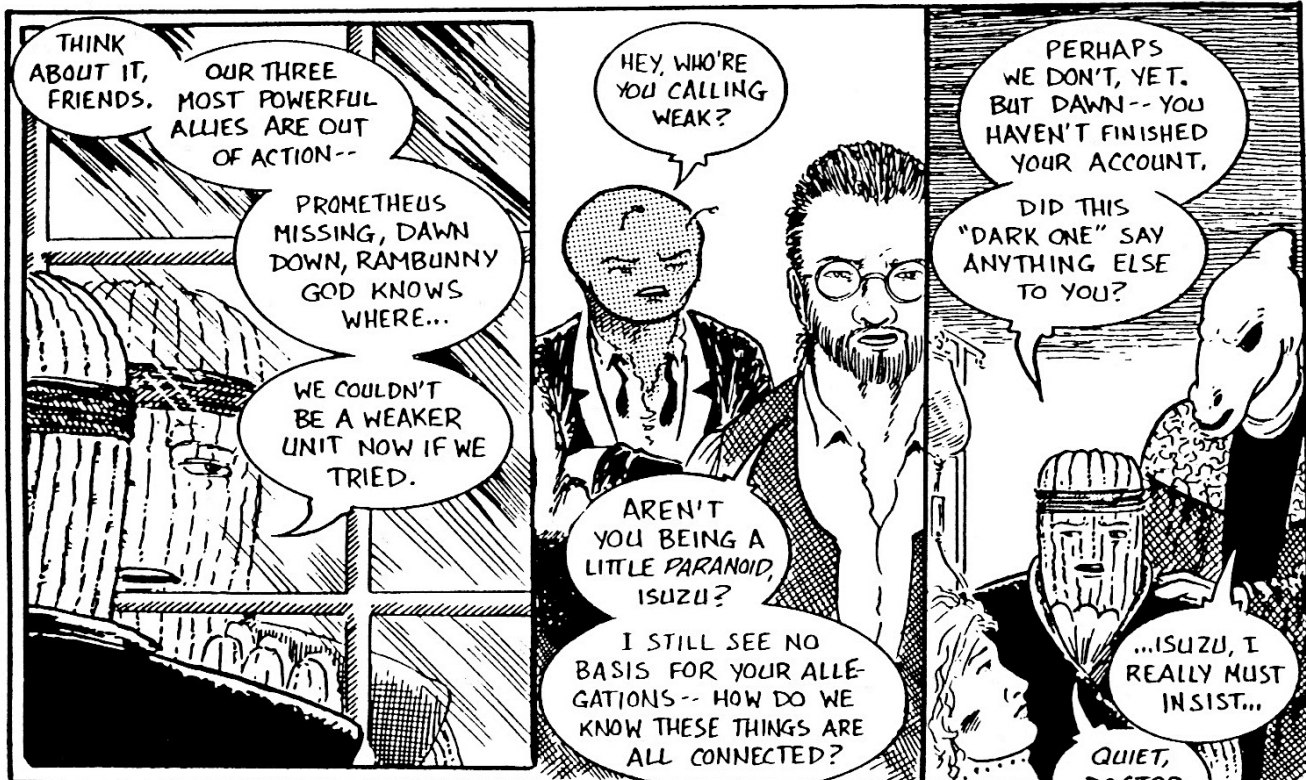
...I DON'T
LIKE THE SOUND
OF THIS AT ALL.
THIS DARK
FELLOW STRUCK
AGAINST YOU SO
QUICKLY, SO CLEANLY,
THAT IT MAKES
ME NERVOUS.



WHAT
ARE YOU
TRYING TO
SAY, ISRU?

YOU THINK
SOMEONE'S OUT
TO GET US?

THAT'S
EXACTLY WHAT
I'M SAYING.



I THINK
IT'S HANK.



HANK?
HANK
JENSEN?
IMPOSSIBLE!

I CAN'T
BELIEVE IT...

BUT I
THOUGHT HE
FLEW INTO OUTER
SPACE FOREVER! *
AND
ANYWAYS,
ISN'T HE ONE
OF THE GOOD
GUYS?

PARA-1-2-J

I... I
THOUGHT SO
TOO.

BUT IF
YOU HEARD
THIS MAN
TALK--

--IT WAS
LIKE HE KNEW
ME.

AND
HATED
ME.

I'VE ALWAYS
FELT GUILTY FOR
WHAT HAPPENED
TO HANK--
WHY WOULDN'T
HE BLAME
ME?

NOW, DAWN,
AS I UNDERSTAND
IT, YOU BOTH AGREED
TO FREE PRO FROM
THAT INSANE
SCIENTIST, DR.
CRANE. *

*AA#9AK

AND HANK'S
OUR FRIEND!
HE WOULDN'T DO
SOMETHING LIKE
THIS!

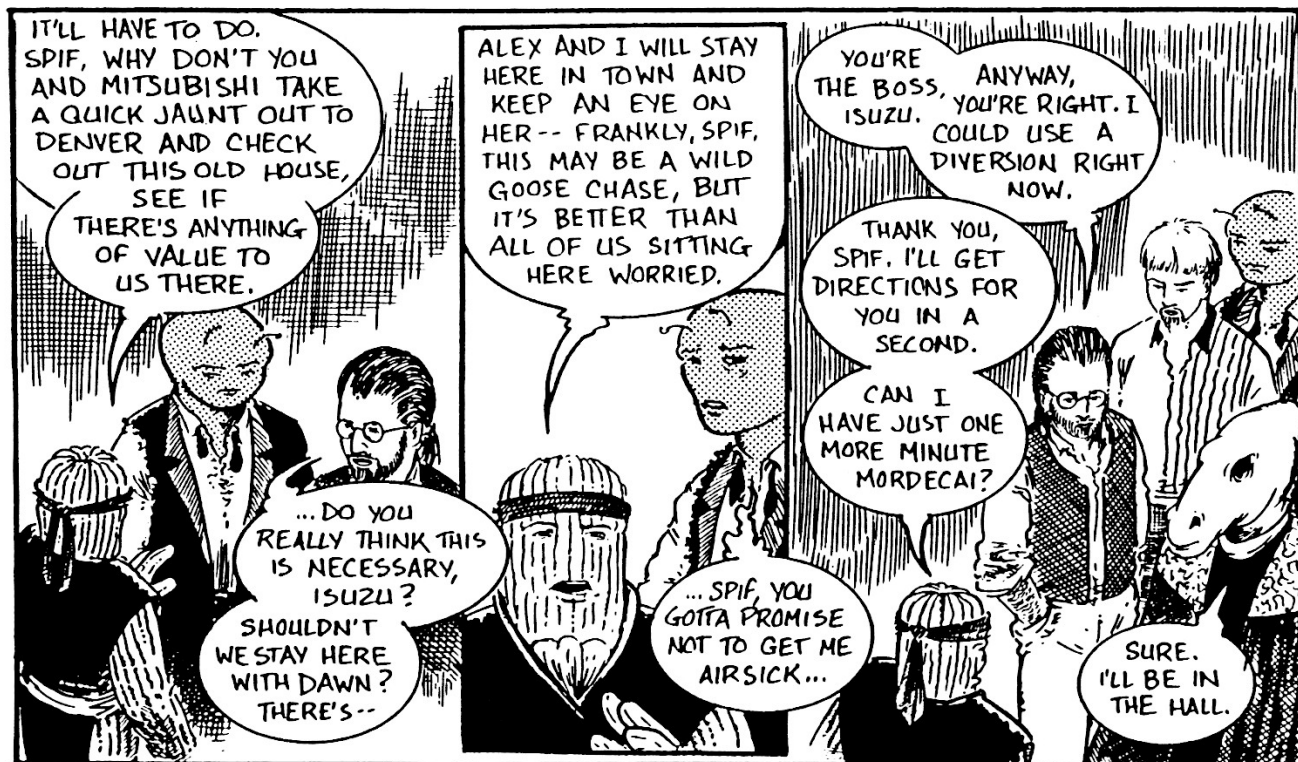
MAYBE
HE HASN'T,
MITSU.

AFTER
ALL, I WAS UNDER
THE IMPRESSION
HE'D LEFT EARTH--
WHAT WOULD MAKE
HIM RETURN LIKE
THIS?

VERY WELL. I HAVE MY
DOUBTS ABOUT HANK
BEING BEHIND THIS, BUT
AS OF NOW IT'S THE
ONLY LEAD WE HAVE TO
NAILING THIS SO-CALLED
"DARK ONE". DAWN, DO YOU
KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT
HANK'S PAST OR OLD
HAUNTS THAT COULD BE
USEFUL?

NONE...
NONE OF YOU
GUYS SAW HANK,
THOSE LAST FEW
DAYS HE WAS
HERE.

THE POWERS CRANE GAVE
HIM WERE DRIVING HIM INSANE,
I THINK -- THEY WERE SO MUCH,
SO UNCONTROLLABLE TO HIM...
HE SEEMED SO LOST. WHO'S
TO SAY WHAT HE COULD BE
CAPABLE OF NOW?





SLOW DOWN!

SLOW DOWN!

I'M GONNA HURLLLL!

ENOUGH WITH THE HISTRIONICS, BUG BRAIN. I ONLY DID ONE BARREL ROLL, ANYWAY.

...oh, God...

I THINK MY INTERNAL ORGANS JUST SPONTANEOUSLY COMBUSTED...

GET YOURSELF SOME COFFEE FROM THE BACK AND SOBER UP, MITSU.

WE'VE GOT WORK TO DO.

...ALL RIGHT, ALL RIGHT...

SO, DID I DO ANYTHING REALLY EMBARRASSING AT THE PARTY LAST NIGHT?*

BEFORE OR AFTER YOU INSTIGATED THE NUDE LIMBO DANCING LINE?

...OY, VEY...

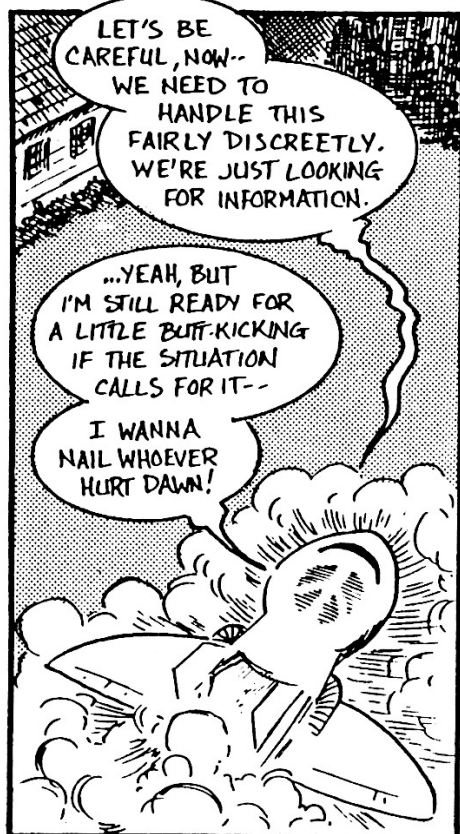
AT THIS SPEED, WE OUGHT TO BE THERE IN TWO HOURS. I JUST WISH I KNEW WHAT WE WERE EXPECTED TO FIND...

YOU DON'T REALLY THINK HANK DID IT, DO YOU? BEAT UP DAWN, I MEAN?

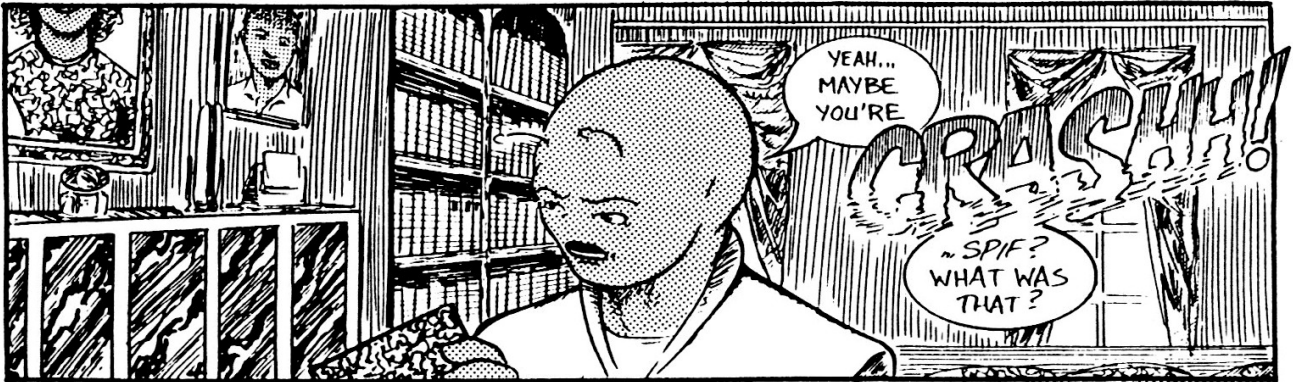
I JUST DON'T KNOW, BUDDY.

IT SEEMS IMPLAUSIBLE, ON THE SURFACE, BUT WHO KNOWS? NONE OF US, SAVE DAWN, SAW HANK WHEN HE LEFT. IF HE WAS AS UNSTABLE AS SHE SAYS, WHO'S TO SAY HE HASN'T COME BACK TO TAKE REVENGE ON THOSE HE SEES AS RESPONSIBLE FOR HIS CONDITION?

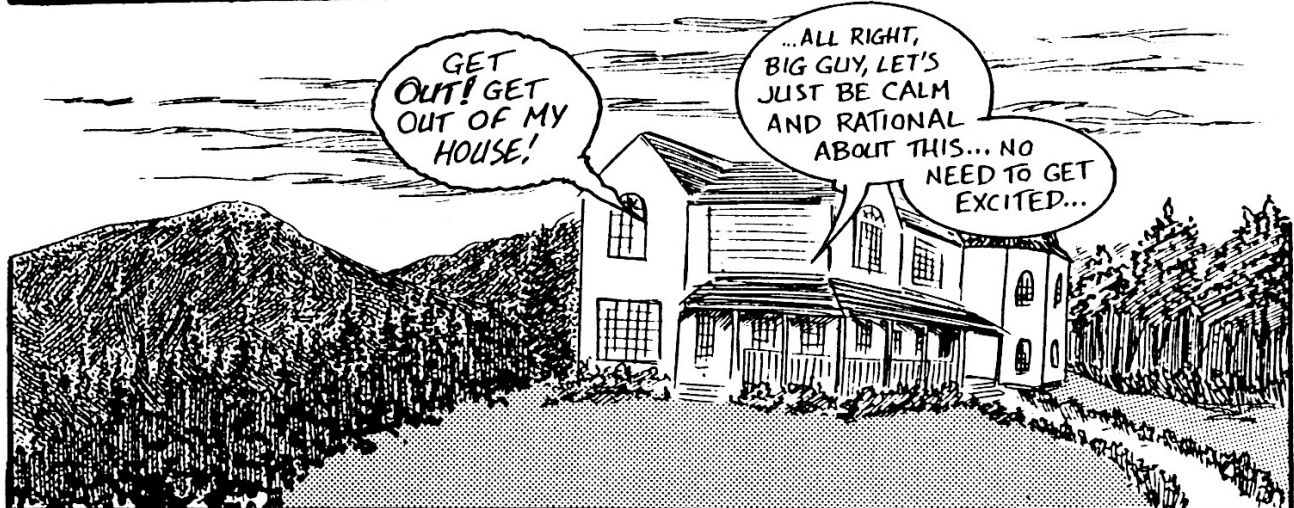
WORLD'S #1 CRIMEFIGHTER

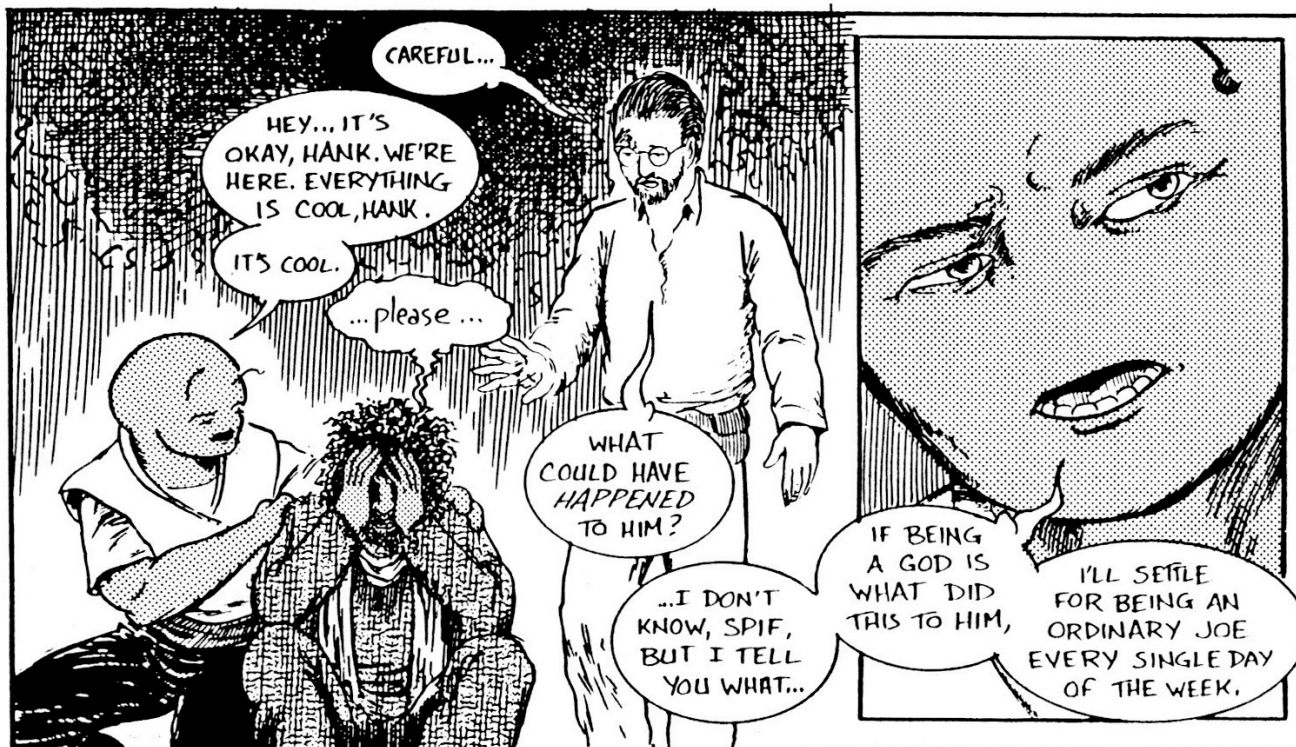






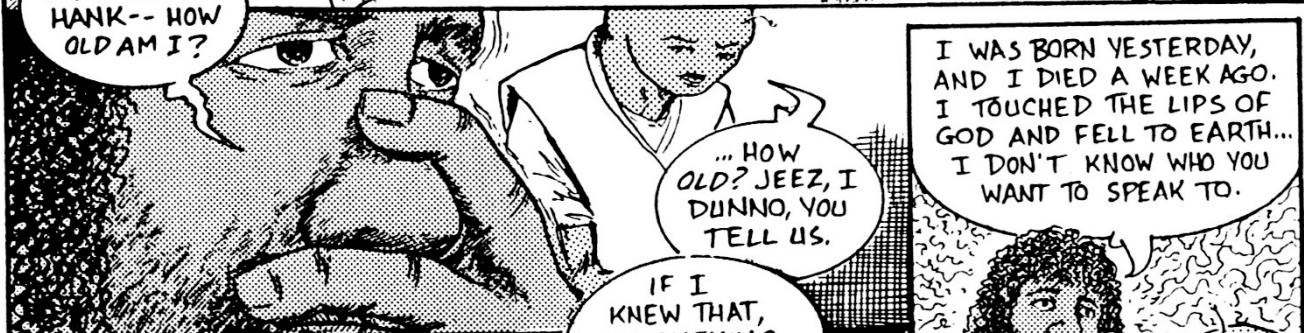








AND ME? MY NAME IS HANK-- HOW OLD AM I?



I WAS BORN YESTERDAY, AND I DIED A WEEK AGO. I TOUCHED THE LIPS OF GOD AND FELL TO EARTH... I DON'T KNOW WHO YOU WANT TO SPEAK TO.

IF I KNEW THAT, EVERYTHING WOULD BE OKAY.

I KNOW IT WOULD.

HANK, DO YOU REMEMBER GOING OFF INTO SPACE? YOU TOLD US YOU WERE GOING OUT INTO SPACE, REMEMBER?

...NO...

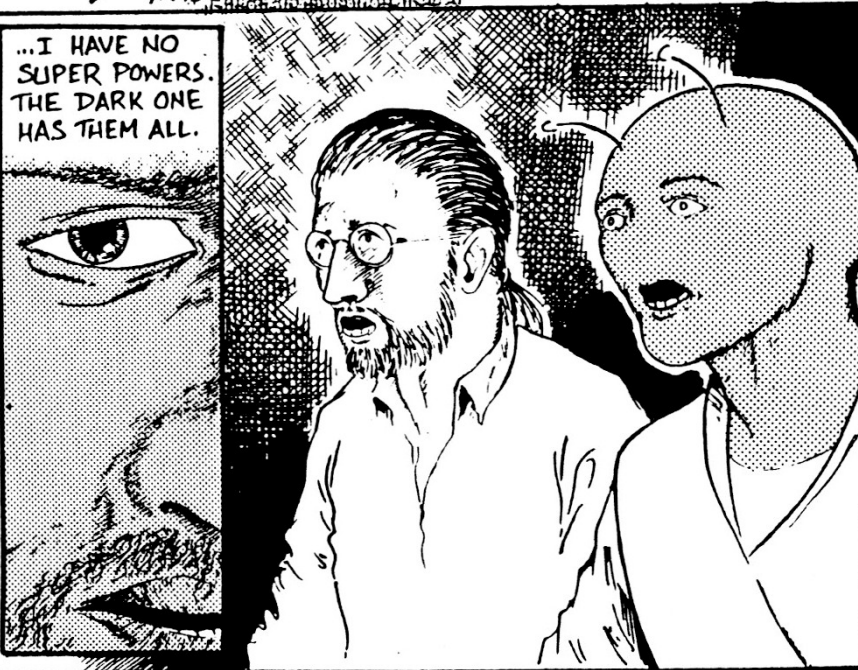
NO... IT WASN'T ME...

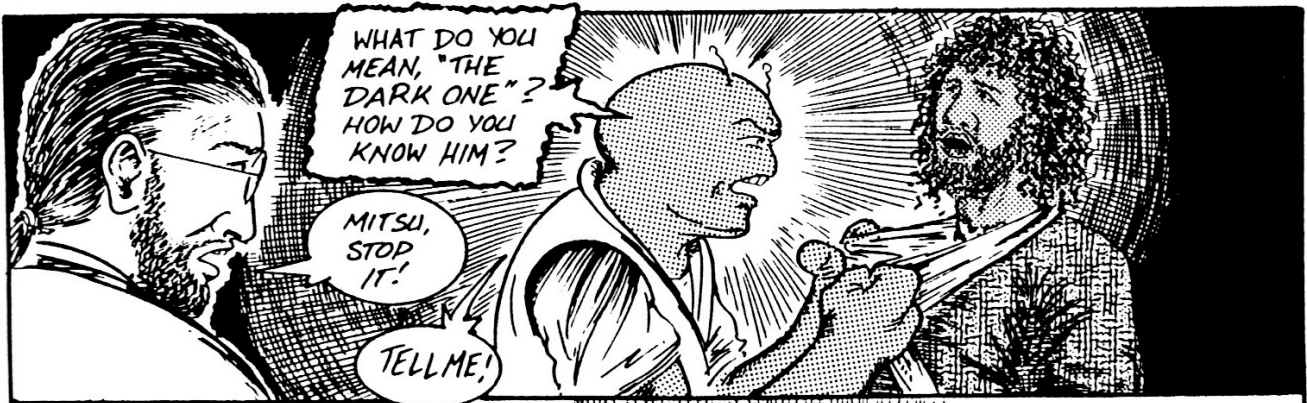
OKAY, HANK, WHAT DO YOU RECALL? WE LAST SAW YOU OVER A YEAR AGO. WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU?

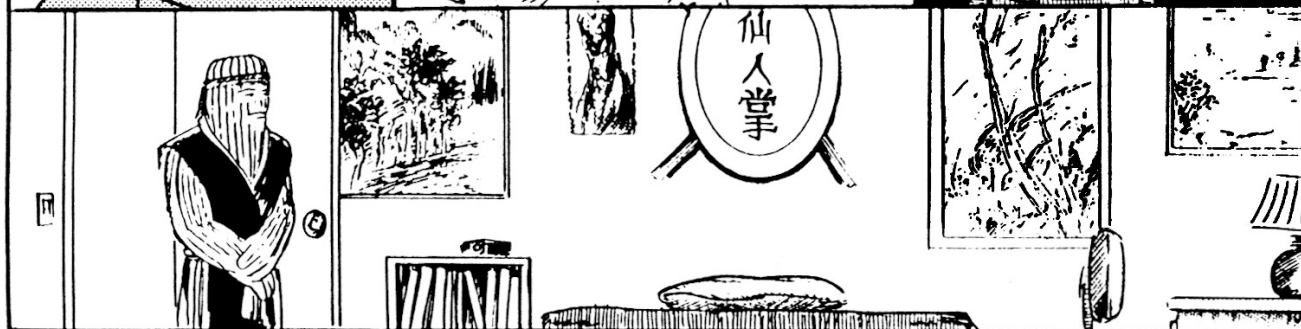
SOMEONE SANE WOULD BE NICE...



...I HAVE NO SUPER POWERS. THE DARK ONE HAS THEM ALL.

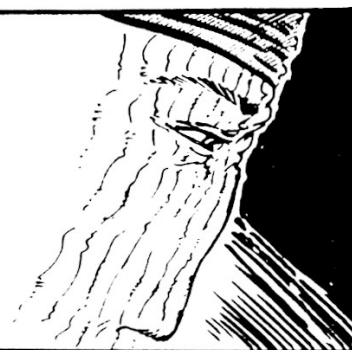


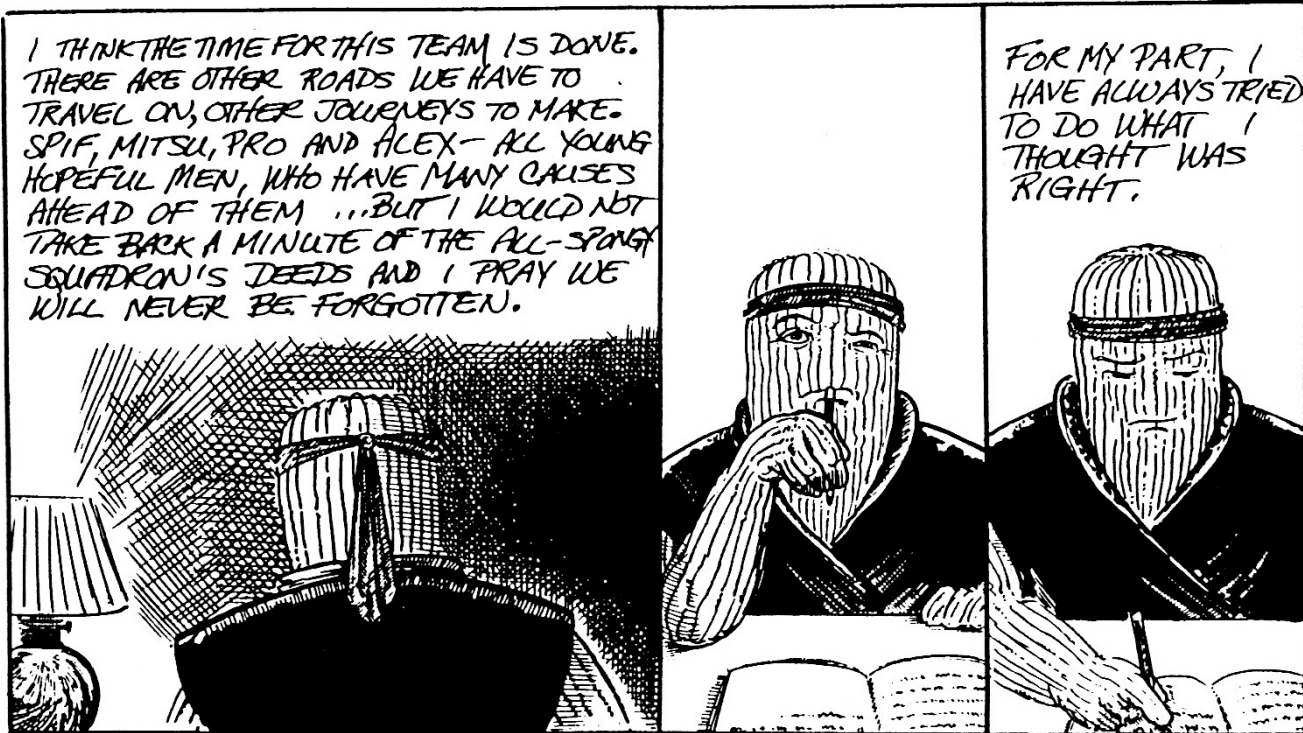


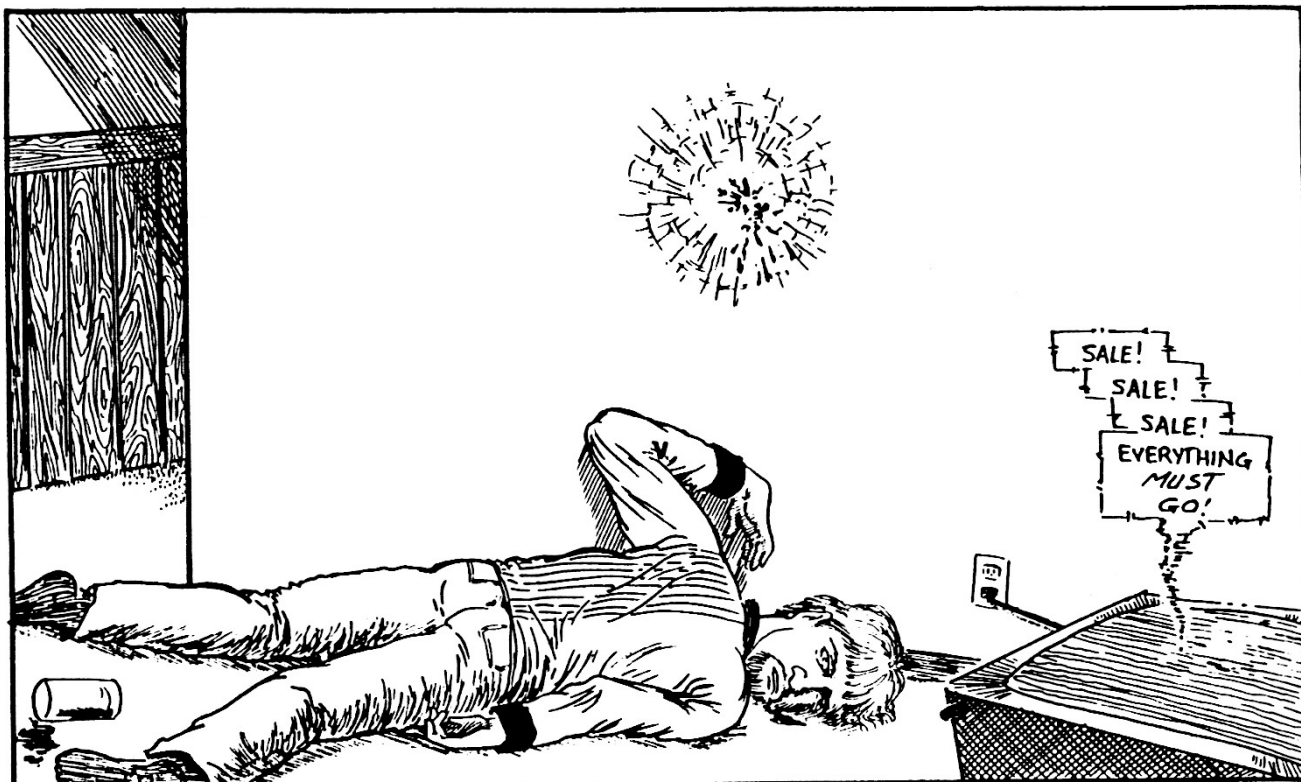


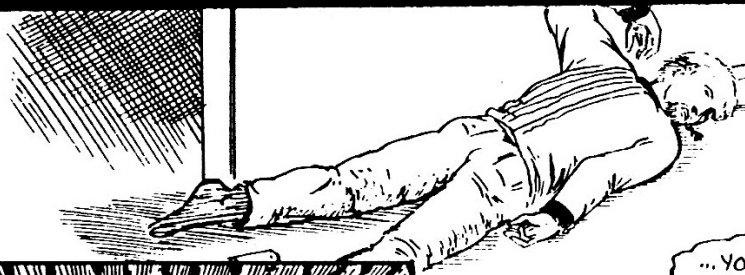
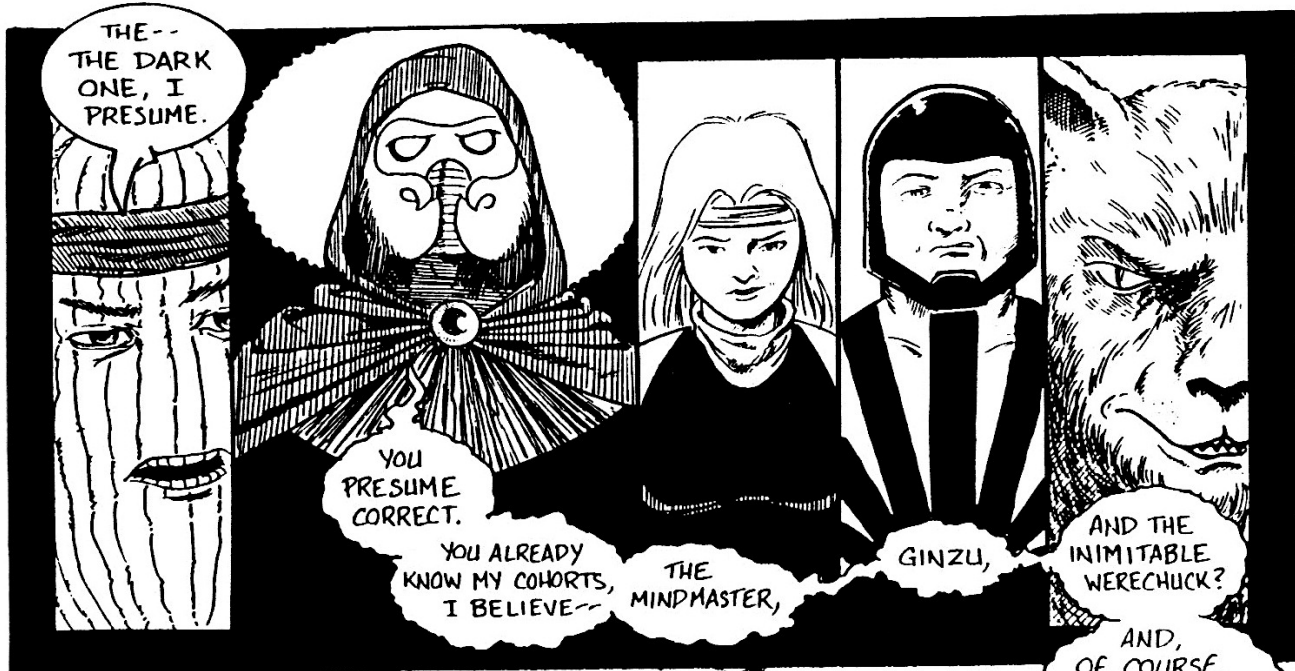
TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 20, 1996 —
IN TWO DAYS I WILL BE
91 YEARS OLD... NOT A
TERRIBLY OLD AGE FOR MY
KIND, NOR A TERRIBLY
YOUNG ONE. BIRTHDAYS
ARE A TIME TO REASSESS
THE STATUS QUO, AND SO
LATELY I'VE WONDERED
WHAT IT IS WE'RE
REALLY DOING.

THE ALL-SPONGY SQUADRON WAS A NOBLE
IDEA; BUT NOBILITY IS A RARE,
FAST-BLOOMING FLOWER. I QUESTION
IF PURE VALOR CAN EVEN EXIST IN
THIS WORLD TODAY — A WORLD OF LAWS
AND RED TAPE, HATE AND FEAR, A WORLD
IN WHICH A BEAUTIFUL YOUNG WOMAN CAN
BE BRUTALLY BEATEN MERELY FOR HER
ALLEGIANCE TO THE REST OF US.



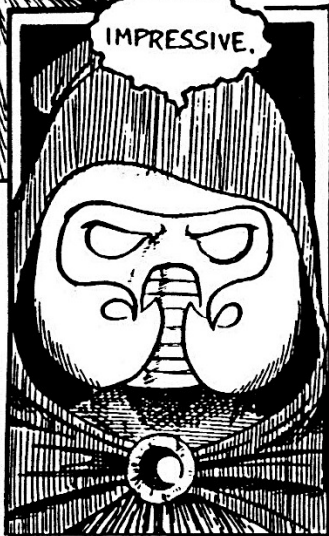
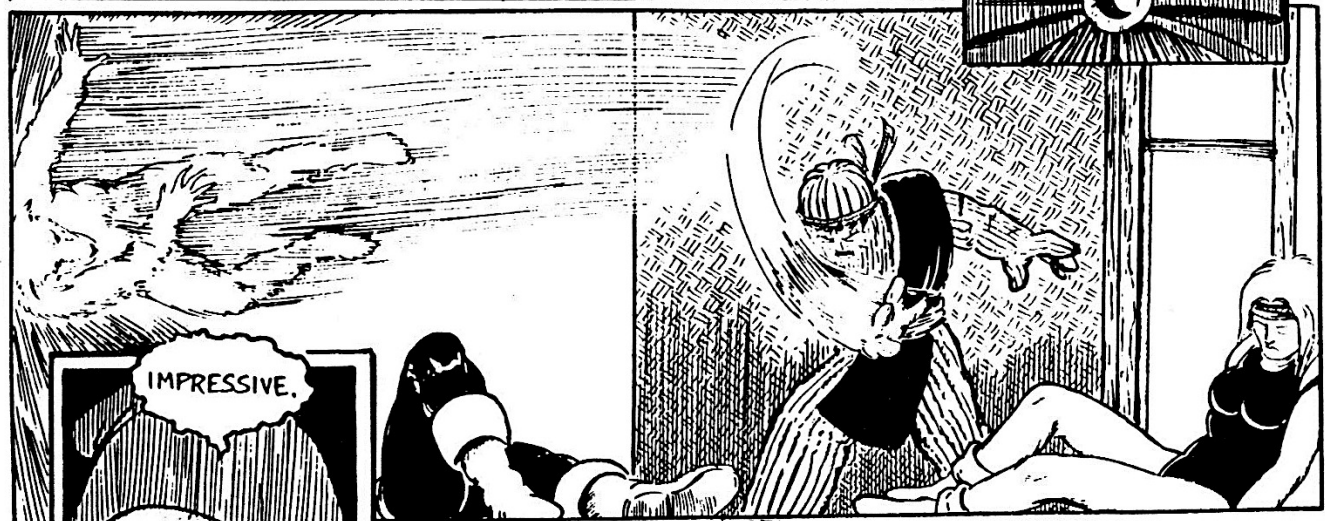




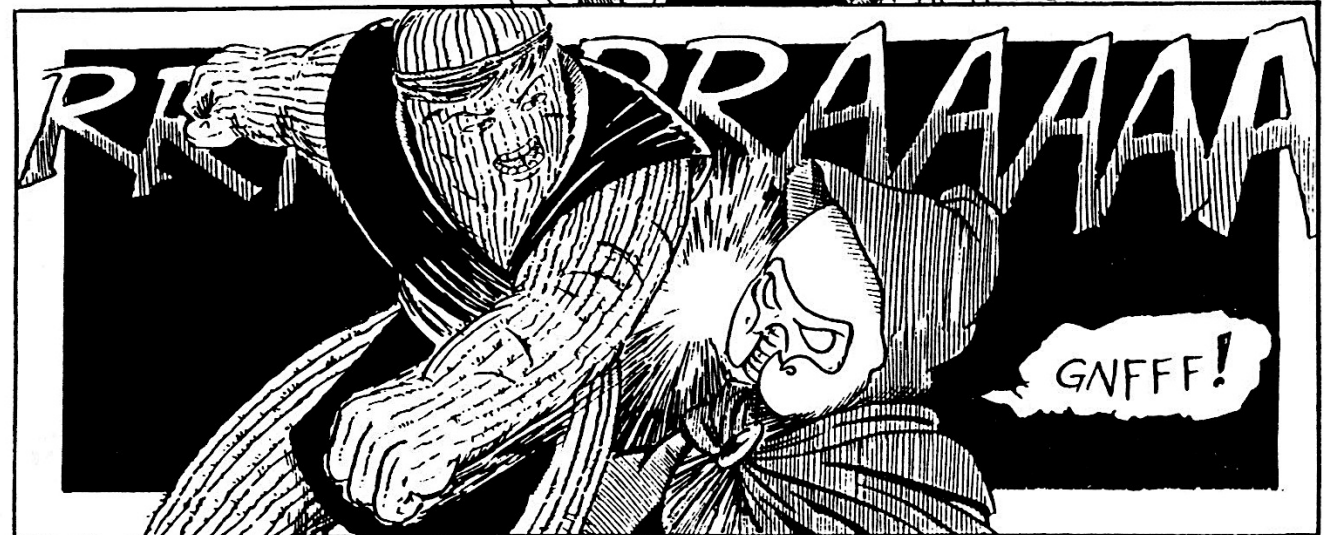


AND,
OF COURSE,
YOUR LATE FRIEND
ALEX --
A MOST
UNFORTUNATE CASE
OF BEING IN THE WRONG
PLACE AT THE
WRONG TIME.





AH-HKKK







NEXT: DEATH

the slimeball speaks

I have an announcement that I'm more than a little sad to make: *Amoeba Adventures* will be coming to an end with #26, the conclusion of "The Dark Ages." Yep, after six years and close to 35 issues of *Amoeba Adventures* and its various spin-offs, I feel the time has come to draw the curtain on *Amoeba*... as a small press series, that is! That's right, you're hearing it here first, *Amoeba Adventures* may be ending as a small press series, but Max and I hope to bring it to a comic shop near you as a bona-fide independent series by late 1997. Watch this space for details on the future of *Amoeba Adventures*!

...

Special thanks to this issue's back cover artist, Scott Roberts, creator of the super-keen *Patty Cake*. You can reach Scott at P.O. Box 546, Monsey NY 10952, and his comic is soon to be published through Tapestry, a division of Caliber Press. Thanks for the great pic, Scott!

...

If you're a subscriber to *Amoeba* and your sub runs out *before* #26, be warned

we're only doing subscriptions on an issue-by-issue basis now. Just send \$2 per issue you wish to subscribe to (except for #25, which will be double-sized and \$3) and you'll be set through #26.

...

In order to get this issue out on time, Max has drawn on a little outside help from the "Inklings": his daughters Gigi (6) and Ashley (5) and son Aaron (4), as well as his mother Beverly, all pitched in on various art chores to get this puppy published. That's right, *Amoeba* is a family affair. Columbus artist Jay Baylifs also helped out with the zipatone application and assorted artsy stuff. Thanks to all for their aid! ...I'm not sure exactly what Max did this issue, drew a few panel borders, maybe...

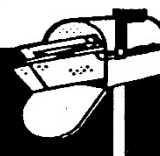
All you Max Ink fans be alerted, too, that Max will be appearing at the UPC*ICE Independent Comics Expo in Chicago October 12 at the Chicago Cultural Center, then the next day he'll be at the Motor City Comic Con in Detroit! Sheesh, that Ink's doin' more traveling than a presidential candidate!

See you folks in #24 in November!



Amoebamail!

PO Box 2230
University MS 38677



(Thanks to everyone who's been writing in with their comments and guesses about "The Dark Ages" storyline — you guys is the bestest! The surprising turnabouts with Prometheus in #22 got a lot of you writing. Without further ado, your comments—Nik)

J. Kevin Carrier
Cincinnati, Ohio

Amoeba Adventures #22 was beautifully-structured: the pace of the conversation, the shifts in Pro's mood as he gets hit with one revelation after another... nicely done.

I admit, though, that I was a little disappointed in the actual details of Pro's origins. I'm sure you'll get a few "hey, yer

rippin' off *Highlander*!" comments. Even besides that, it kind of sucks that all the clues you've dropped in the past (Inner Gods, Promethean, etc.) turn out to be complete red herrings. I'm guessing that at some point in the last few years, you decided that the giant aliens-n-stuff were too cheesy, and decided to retcon it into something less flamboyant. Fair enough, but as someone who enjoys trying to figure these little mysteries out, I felt a bit cheated.

Speaking of which, in case I haven't mentioned it before, I'm convinced that the Dark One is our old pal Dr. Crane. I suspected it when he dropped the phrase "Details of Design" a while back, and his

comments to Dawn last issue clinched it. Of course, the way you're going, he'll probably turn out to be Potter in disguise too... (heh)

Anyhoo, I'm still digging the book mightily, and I can't wait for you guys to go full-size. Good luck!

Terry Flippo
Mt. Airy, Maryland

Thanks for *Amoeba Adventures* #22. I continue to be impressed by the sheer quality of this book. "The Dark Ages" is shaping up to be the defining moment in an already-excellent series. Even though there were no fight scenes and nearly the whole book consisted of a conversation I was glued to the pages. Everyone knows the *real* story is what happens between the fight scenes, anyway.

Nik, you continue to make Pro a very human (?) character, not a cardboard cut-out. His responses to Jacob Potter's revelations were all very believable. The little guy has really been through the wringer. The Jacob Potter character works for me too. He seems to be a combination of the Hob Gadling character from *Sandman* and The Highlander. I like the idea that he will serve as a spiritual guide of sorts for Pro.

Max, great job on the art as usual. Being a detail nut myself, I really appreciate the amount of work you put into each page. Your nature scenes have amazed me since I started reading AA. And is it just me or is Jacob Potter a dead ringer for Harlan Ellison?

(Good call! When giving Max a description of Jacob, I told him he was "kinda a cross between Harlan Ellison and Peter O'Toole with a little Roddy McDowall thrown in" - Nik)

Patrick J. Lee
Downey, California

Amoeba Adventures #22 was a truly stunning book. Even having never read the series before, I found the story involving and compelling. It is so dense that I couldn't believe you did it in 20 pages. Amazing.

Also, Max Ink's art is really good, he really brings your characters to life. I was impressed at how visually interesting the

piece was considering it is just two characters talking the entire issue.

David Hedgecock
Los Angeles, California

Overall I liked *Amoeba Adventures* #22. Since I haven't read a lot of the books that get referred to it doesn't affect me as much that it has all been revealed as a sham. I did imagine other readers going WHAT?! All that other stuff was a *set-up*? Just so he wouldn't go crazy upon learning he was an immortal? What is this, the Spider-Clone saga? Heh heh. I hope you made some people crazy. Almost as good as a poignant moment is throwing everyone for a 180.

Tony Lorenz
Orlando, Florida

Amoeba #22 had some of Max's best art I've seen from him in a while. (I thought maybe he was getting burned out.) The storyline is moving right along, where I don't know yet. Living forever sounds cool, but think about the people you love and care about getting old and dying. Kinda sucks.

(This is why I like Tony. He's always got the bottom line in view. —Nik)

Jason Marcy
Hamilton, Ontario

Whoa!! (He said, in his best Joey Lawrence fashion.) What a plot twist! Prometheus an immortal? Yow! Of course, Jacob Potter could be a phony baloney guy, too. I think it's all a little too pat for this revelation to be Prometheus's resolution to where he comes from. Or, I could be wrong. An overall interesting interlude into this major storyline. The final page, with Spif's "it's all over" line, had me wishing ol' Max already had #23 finished so I could immediately open its cover and find out what the heck Spif was talking about.

I'm still hedging my bets that "The Dark One" is still Doctor Crane, he of the "Details of Design" story in #6-10. Of course, then I started thinking — Crane wasn't the only guy who croaked in that big explosion in #9. Maybe The Dark One is some malevolent combination of those

souls — or he's just a janitor in the wrong place at the right time. Oog. You've spun quite a web, young Dirga.

Sean Bieri
Detroit, Michigan

Thanks for the new *Amoebas*. Foolishly, I read "The Dark Ages" #3 before #2. What do you mean "It's over," it's only part three! I really love the expressions you give Prometheus; I always imagine him moving with that sort of staggered, organic flow old-fashioned claymation has. (If they made an *Amoeba Adventures* movie no doubt he'd be a seamlessly animated computer creation — that's no fun!) How much of those subtle takes Pro does are scripted and how much does Max do — do you do the breakdowns or does he?

(Since #18 or so I've provided Max with rough — some would say extremely rough — breakdowns of each page, and he takes it from there and makes it all artistic-lookin'. - Nik)

Eric Hess
Latrobe, Pennsylvania

Thanks for AA #22! At long last, the true origin of Prometheus is revealed.

Pro's reaction to Jacob's revelations is just beautiful; who wouldn't feel patronized and insulted by the old "it was for your own good" argument? Of course, Pro's always been a highly emotional fella (hey, he came from the female void, right?).

The "I need to sit down" panel made me laugh. Max has such a wonderful mastery of amoeba anatomy!

And of course #22 contained the most chilling question of all: what strange fascination does that sheep hold for Jacob Potter? (Jacob, you're a baa-aa-aad man!)

Who is The Dark One? Well, up until now I was siding with Kevin Carrier; Dr. Isak Crane certainly seemed the likely possibility, even given that he never had super powers and was supposed to have been blowed up real good in #9.

However.

While rereading back issues (yum), I stumbled across panel 1, page 21 of #18... and saw it, really saw it, for the first time. You know the panel I mean: Mindmaster is

Hey Kids! We now have an e-mail address to send your comments to:
Oxford_Town@mspress.tfnnet.org.

in the Dark One's lair, watching a wall full of video surveillance clips of our heroes. At the time, I just... accepted it. Well, call me slow on the uptake, but I just now realized that some of those clips were of scenes from as far back as #13 (lower left corner: Pro, Isuzu and Alex watching *Raising Arizona*)... the one of Hank in the upper left corner dating back even before that (#11, page 16 panel 6)!

Now hold on just one dang-blasted minute!

Either Max was using artistic license there, or... geez, The Dark One's had the Squadron under surveillance for *quite* some time. Granted, Crane had the technology to undertake a project like that, but Alex thoroughly remodeled our heroes' Amoebacave after #11! That means either a) Alex never noticed all The Dark One's surveillance devices (!), b) The Dark One is using a nontechnological (i.e., super-powered or mystic) means of spying on the Squadron, or (and this is the frightening one) c) *Alex is in on the plot... or is in fact The Dark One himself.* Gahhhh!

(Congratulations, Eric! You are one of only three regular Amoeba Adventures readers to catch on to — part of — The Dark One mystery, as revealed at the conclusion of this issue. Peter Hopkins of Louisville, Ky. and Jerzy Drozd of Michigan were the only two others to fixate on Alex. You three wise guys are officially awarded "The Golden Protoplasm Award" for your sleuthing skills. As this issue's shocking ending shows, it's obvious Alex is deeply involved in the plot against the gang — but just wait, kids, the craziness is just starting. If that ain't a plug for next issue, I don't know what is! See you in 60! — Nik)

NEXT ISSUE: Mo' bad stuff and things get real crazy real quick, in part five of "The Dark Ages."



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AMOEBA ADVENTURES #22 - Part three of "The Dark Ages," where Prometheus that everything he knows about himself is a lie. 28 page digest, \$2.00

PROMETHEUS: THE SILENT STORM - The All-Spongy Squadron's lives are hit by the AIDS epidemic, as an old friend is revealed to be HIV-positive. Digest, \$2.00

SPIF #1 - The token human of the team steps out into his own solo book, plotted by Nik Dirga, written by Troy Hickman and drawn by Max Ink. Digest, \$2.00

DR. PHLEGM #1 - The first full-length collaboration of Nik and Max. 12 page digest, 50¢

AMOEBA ADVENTURES: ONLY A MAN - Collecting the long out-of-print *Prometheus* #3-6 with a brand new cover and introduction. 84-page mid-magazine, \$4.00

Ordering Information: All prices include postage. Canadian and foreign orders, please include an extra \$5 for postage. Please make all checks payable to Nik Dirga, *not* Protoplasm Press. Please allow 3-5 weeks for delivery.

**Send them orders to: Protoplasm Press c/o Nik Dirga
P.O. Box 2230, University, MS 38677-2230**



THE UFO CHECKLIST



Here's a list of the latest releases in Fall 1996 by the members of the United Fanzine Organization, a co-op of self-publishers interested in creating good comics. For information about joining the UFO, contact current Chairman John Yeo, Jr. at P.O. Box 2620, E. Peoria IL 61611.

LOOKING FOR MORE GREAT SMALL PRESS COMICS? CHECK OUT THE LATEST FROM THE UFO!

☒ **The Adventurers #7:** "Hell on Earth" continues as John Yeo's heroes face their greatest challenges yet, as a demon invasion overtakes New York and leaves The Adventurers helpless! Fine superhero action in the classic *Teen Titans* vein. 28 page digest, \$1.50 from John Yeo, Jr. at P.O. Box 2620, E. Peoria IL 61611.

☒ **The Global Gazette #3:** Is the world ready for the adventures of Atomic Fruit? Written by Scott Dutton and drawn by Derek Mah. All this lunacy in a 20 page digest, \$2.00 from Scott Dutton, 739 15th Avenue SW Apt. 4, Calgary, Alberta, T2R 0R8 Canada.

☒ **Holey Crullers #3:** Troy Hickman and Jerry Smith's groundbreaking small press superhero comic continues with two stories this issue. "Heir of Truth" introduces the heroes Charm and Strangeness and explores their mysterious past, while "Elsewhere" features the Analog Kid's search for his missing mentor. 28 page digest, \$1.50 from Troy Hickman, 3200 S. 9th St. Apt. A, Lafayette IN 47905.

☒ **Rhino Bytes #1:** Don't touch that dial! This is the old *F-Man* with a new title. Denny Stephens' hilarious ne'er do-well hero and his sidekick Rhino Boy fight evil and other bad stuff in this 24 page digest, \$1.50 from Denny Stephens, P.O. Box 716, Ortonville MI 48462.

☒ **The Professional Unofficial Chicago Comicon 1996 Whip Cream Jam Comic #1:** Don't try to take this comic seriously, because it could utterly damage your mental health! Scott McClung and an all-star cast of creators bring you a goofy, wacky tale of the Whip Cream Factory. With cameos by small pressers including Larry Blake, Pam Bliss, Greg Hyland and more. 12 page digest a steal for a mere dime from Scott McClung, 537 S. University #6, Norman OK 73069.

☒ **Tetragrammaton Fragments #152:** The official newsletter of small press's oldest and most distinguished co-op, now entering its 28th year! Full of news, comics and reviews - sample copy \$2 from Chairman John Yeo, address above.

...And still out there:

• **AG Graphix Presents #5:** 24 page digest, \$1.50 from Anthony Gray, 1103 West St., Utica NY 13501.

• **Amoeba Adventures #22:** 28 page digest, \$2.00 from Nik Dirga, P.O. Box 2230, University MS 38677-2230

• **Global Gazette Special #1:** 24 page digest, \$1 from Scott Dutton, 739 15th Avenue SW Apt. 4, Calgary, Alberta, T2R 0R8 Canada.

• **Mister Midnite Special #3:** 28 page digest,

\$1.50 from Bob Elinskas, 1805 Girard St., Utica NY 13501.

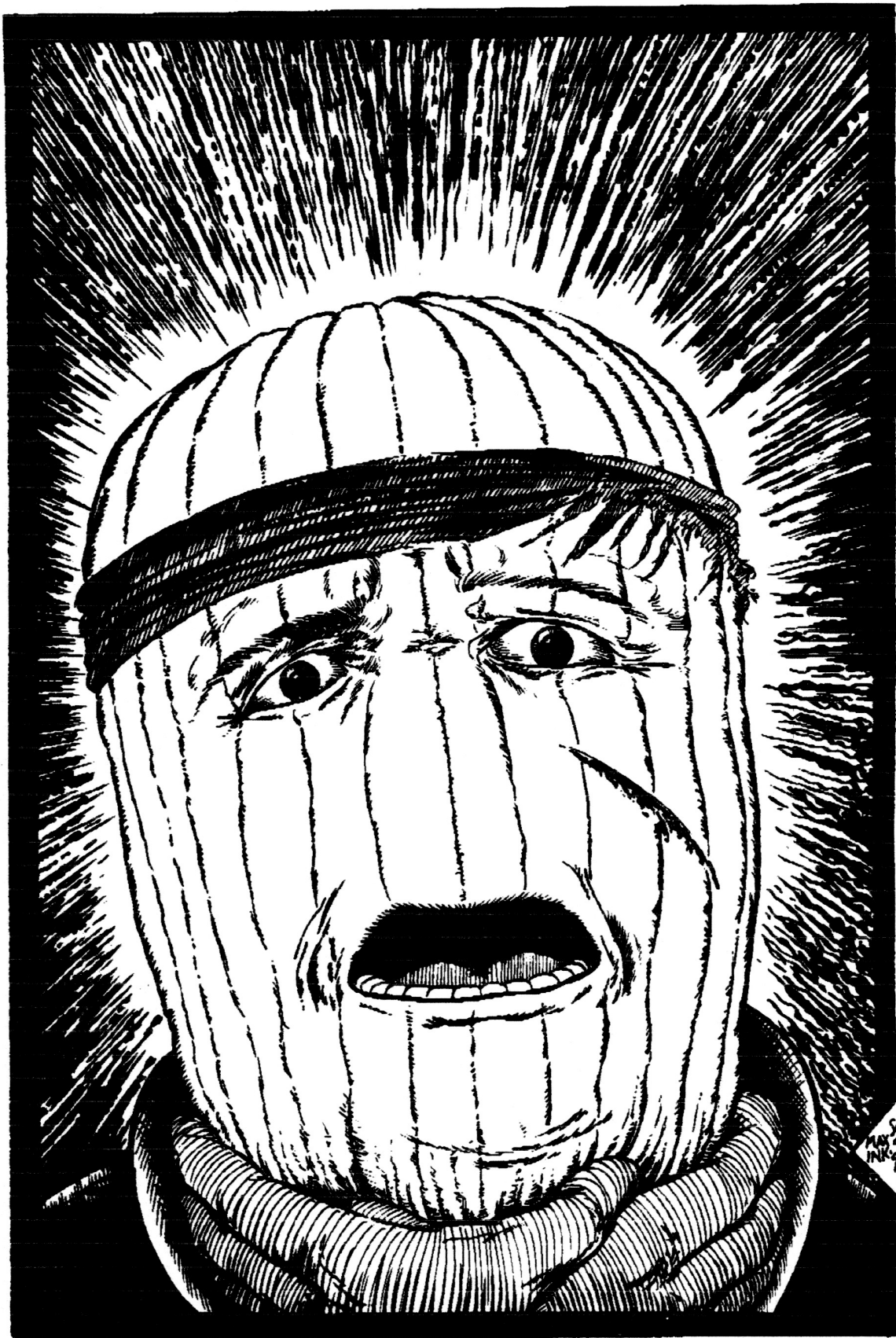
• **Project 72 #1:** 20 page digest, \$1 from Jason Wright, 1813 Girard St., Utica NY 13501.

• **Ronnie & David #14:** 8 page digest, 50¢ from Rich Watson, 172-32 133rd Ave. #11-A, Jamaica NY 11434.

• **Time's Up #5:** 28 page digest, \$1 from Patrick J. Lee, 10720 S. Lakewood Blvd #335, Downey CA 90241-3555.



SPECIAL 2020 BONUS SECTION



Here's Max Ink's first go at the cover for Amoeba Adventures #23. I think we thought Karate Kactus looked a little too scared and went with a more determined look for the final.