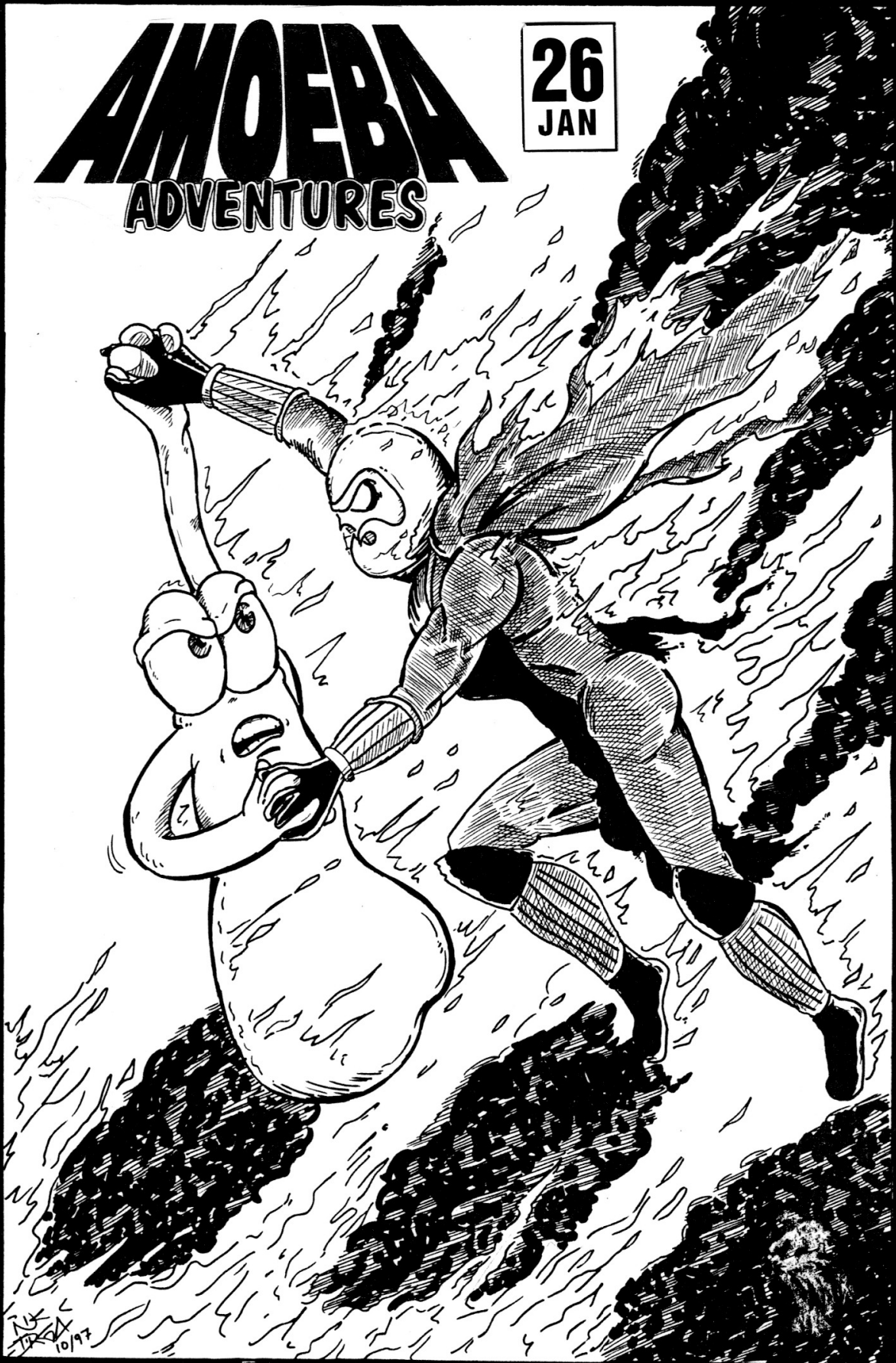


# AMOeba

## ADVENTURES

26  
JAN



THE DARK AGES • 7 OF 8

PROTOPLASM PRESS • \$2.50 U.S. \$3.00 CAN • JANUARY 1998

## "Wrath"

Created and written  
by Nik Dirga  
Art by Max Ink  
Additional art by Nik Dirga

"There are no fixed limits,  
Time does not stand still.  
Nothing endures,  
Nothing is final."

—Autumn Floods, Chuang Tzu

### THE SLIMEBALL SPEAKS

Hola, mon freres! This issue is the big one, the one we've been leading up to — well, just about since #1, if you wanna get down to it. Those who thought last issue was too talky better dig this one, because it's wall-to-wall action as "The Dark Ages" finally winds down.

Despite what I've previously announced, I've decided that next issue will be the final issue of *Amoeba Adventures*. There's a lot of reasons for it, which I'm not really able to go into yet. Thanks to everyone for all their support over the years — I'll have more on the whys and howfors of this decision next issue.

• • •

Several small press books of interest to *Amoeba* fans came out during our "hiatus" between #24 and #25, and they're all worthy of your hard-earned moolah.

First, our own long-delayed *Rambunny* solo book came out back in spring, by myself and artist Ron Gravelle. It's still available for a mere \$2 postpaid from me and a must-have for any fans of *Amoeba's* own

raging rabbit. Check out some of the letters on it later on in this issue.

Last summer, I also compiled a collection of my non-comic writing, putting together a group of my newspaper columns I'd written for the various papers I worked for from 1994 to 1997. At 72 pages, *Spatula Forum* is my own personal favorite work, featuring writings on everything from puppy love to my ancestors to climbing the Empire State Building. If you'd like to see some of my non-comics work, this is it! I still have a handful left, which I'll let you have for a mere \$5 postpaid. Drop me a line if you're interested in *Spatula Forum*.

My good pal, Canadian small presser Jason Marcy, decided he just had to get in on that "Dark Ages" action. He's recently released *Untold Tales Of Powerwus* #1, which features a goofy little "Dark Ages" side-tale that details what happens when his bumbling hero Powerwus decides to avenge his drinking buddy Rambunny's beating at the hands of The Dark One.

It also has a reprint of the long out-of-print 1993 *Tetragrammaton Fragments* story by Jay and myself that

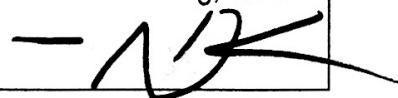
teamed Rambunny and Powerwus for the first time, in what else but a good ol' fashioned barroom brawl? A must for any AA fan! It's a mere buck from Jay at 57 McElroy Rd. E, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada L9A 1Y5.

Also, the Small Press Syndicate's long-in-the-works comic jam *Carpal Tunnel Syndrome* finally came out last year. Written and drawn by a good two dozen small press talents including Rich Watson, Troy Hickman, Denny Stephens and myself, the closest thing I can compare it to is a free-wheeling "Crisis On Infinite Small Press Earths." Tons of famous small press characters, including *Amoeba* stars Prometheus and Rambunny, take part in the merriment and it's a blast. It's a small press event and, I think and hope, is still available for a mere \$2.00 from J. Kevin Carrier, 8913 Eldora Dr., Cincinnati OH 45236.

• • •

We'll see you back here in 30 days for the grand finale of all things *Amoeba*, the fittingly titled "What Happened Next."

Thanks for reading, folks—



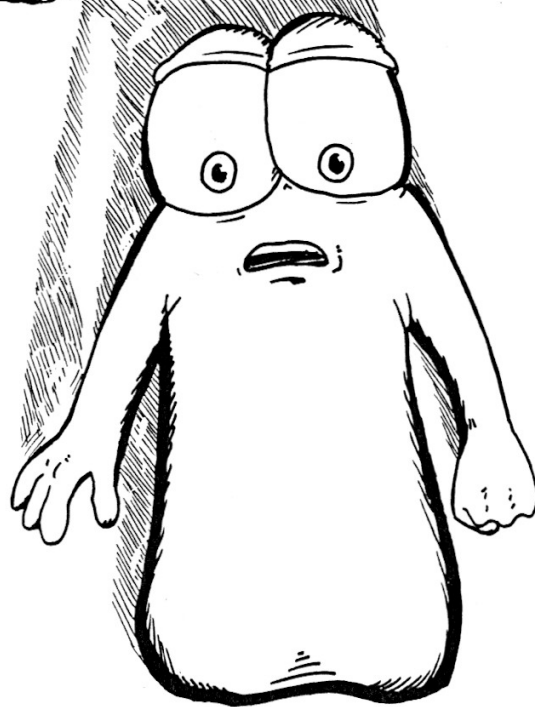
AMOEBA ADVENTURES #26. January 1998, is published three times a year by Protoplasm Press, P.O. Box 64, Oakdale CA 95361-0064. *Amoeba Adventures* and all characters herein are ©1998 Nik Dirga, all rights reserved. Additional copies are available for \$2.50 postpaid, \$3.00 Canada.



**I**N THE LATER YEARS OF HIS LIFE (AND PROMETHEUS WOULD INDEED GO ON TO LIVE AN EXTRAORDINARILY LONG ONE), PROMETHEUS WAS CONVINCED THAT THERE WAS ONE MOMENT THAT COULD HAVE CHANGED EVERYTHING.

ALEX, THE REVEALED DARK ONE, HAD JUST FINISHED HIS SOLILOQUY. THERE WAS AN INSTANT OF CALM.

PROMETHEUS SEARCHED FRANTICALLY FOR THE ONE WORD, THE ONE PHRASE THAT COULD SNAP ALEX BACK TO SANITY. HE KNEW IT WAS THERE. HE KNEW ONLY HE COULD SAVE ALEX.



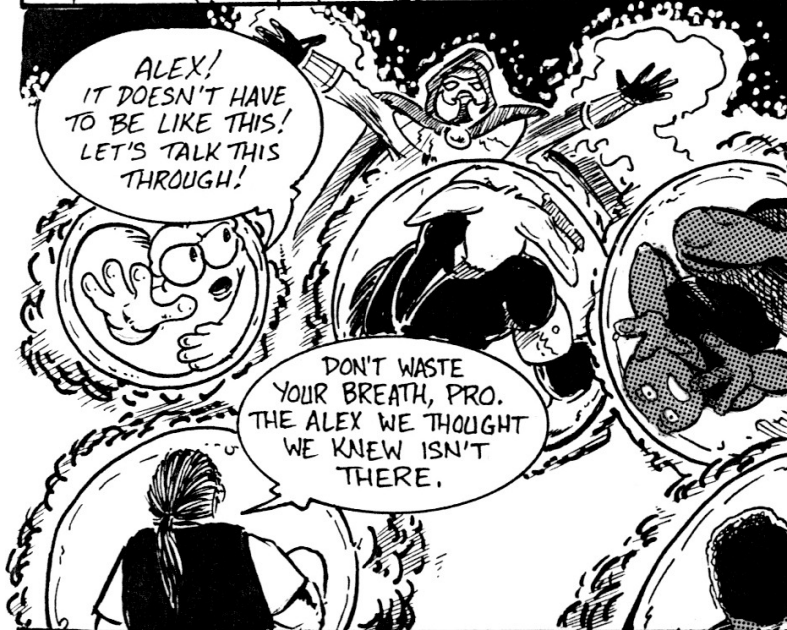
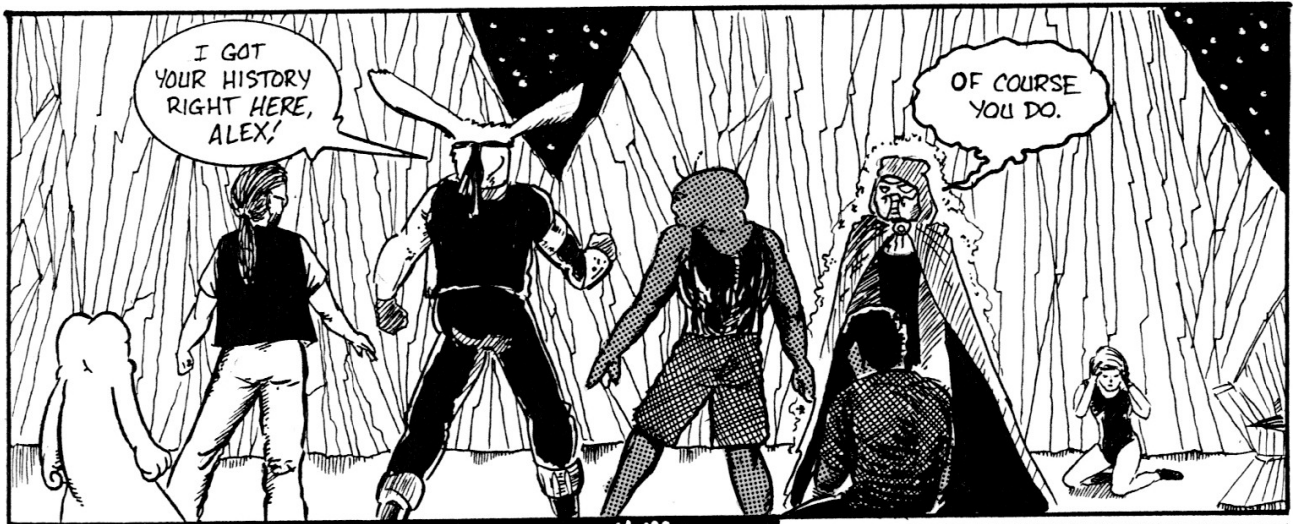
BUT IN THAT ONE MOMENT, PROMETHEUS FALTERED.

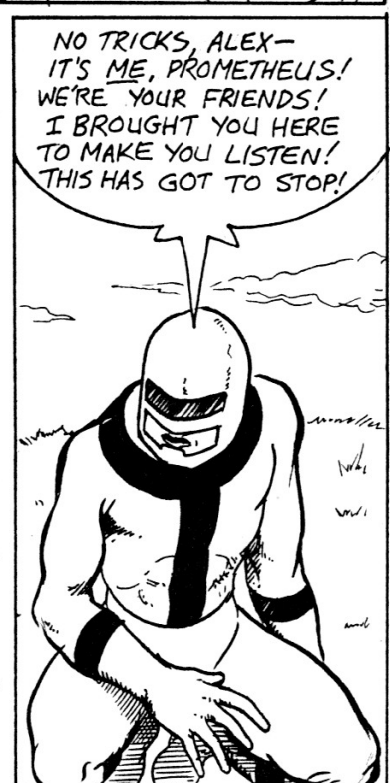
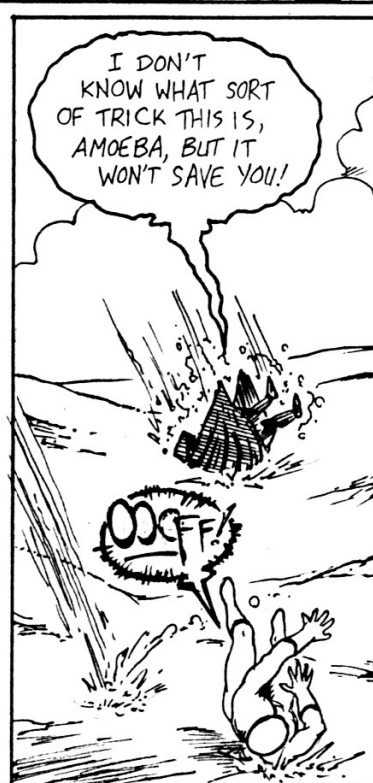
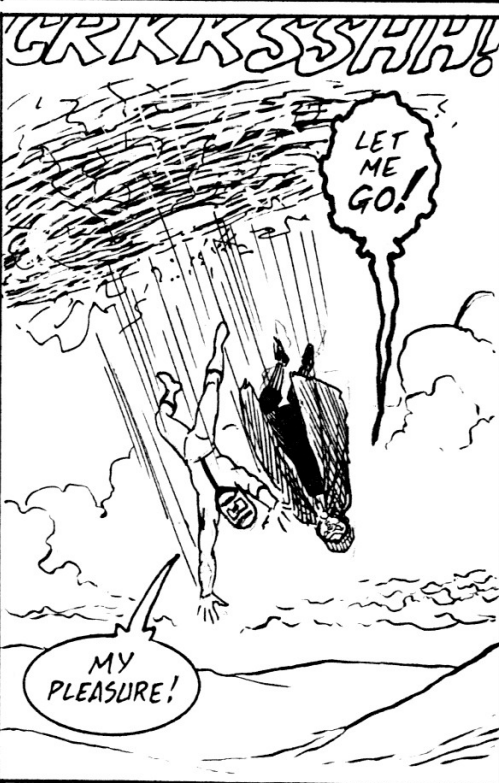
AND THE MOMENT PASSED.

PERHAPS THERE WAS NO MAGIC MOMENT AFTER ALL—PERHAPS NOTHING COULD HAVE SAVED ALEX THEN.

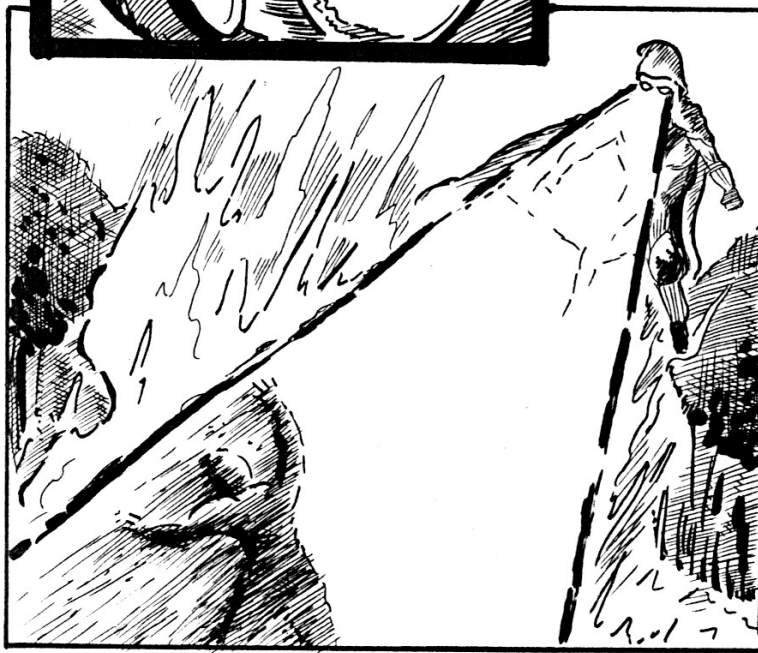
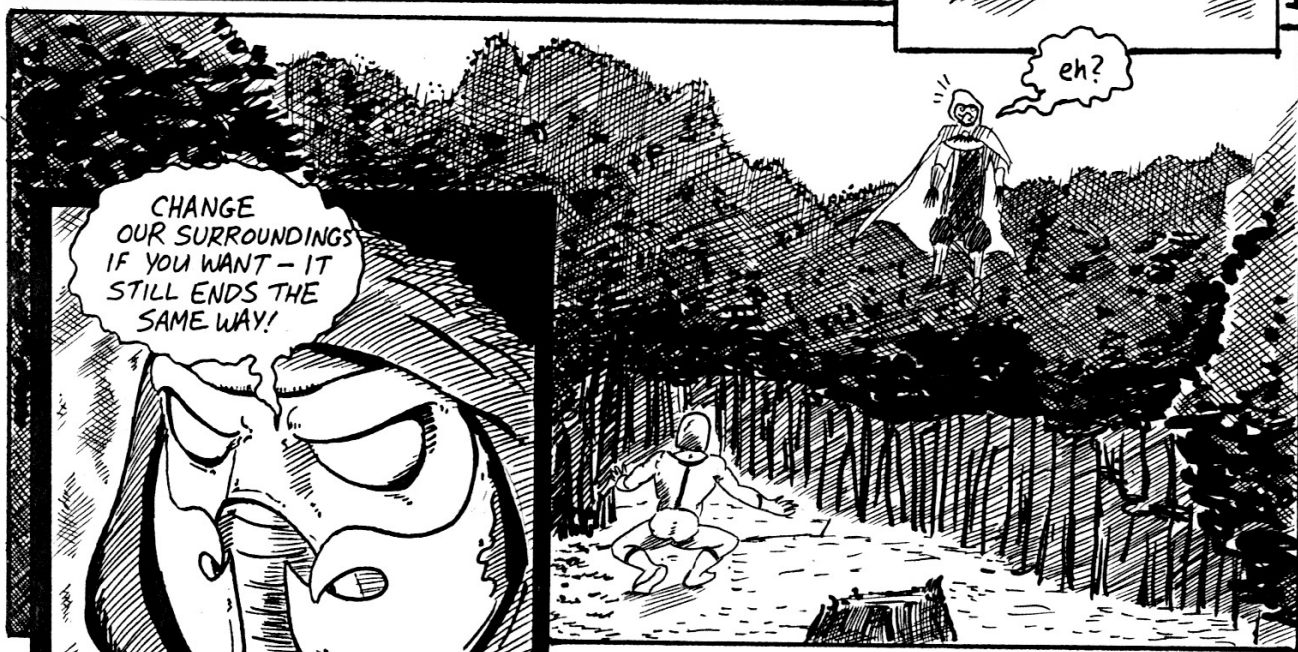
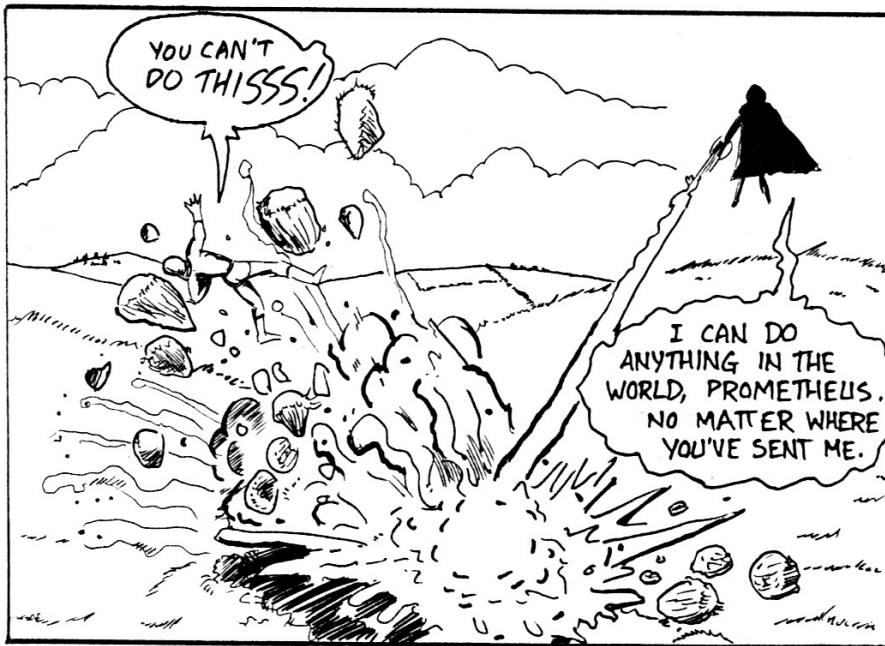
BUT OUR HEARTS LONG FOR WHAT-IFS, AND THEY ARE SOLACE FOR US WHEN REALITY IS UNJUST.

PROMETHEUS WOULD CLING TO THAT LOST MOMENT, AND REGRET IT UNTIL THE FAR-OFF DAY WHEN HE FINALLY DIED.



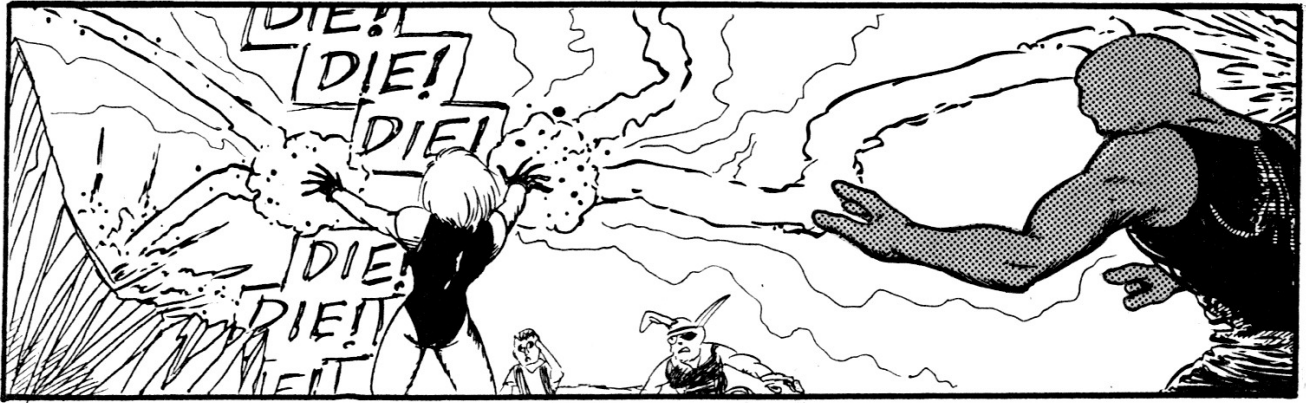




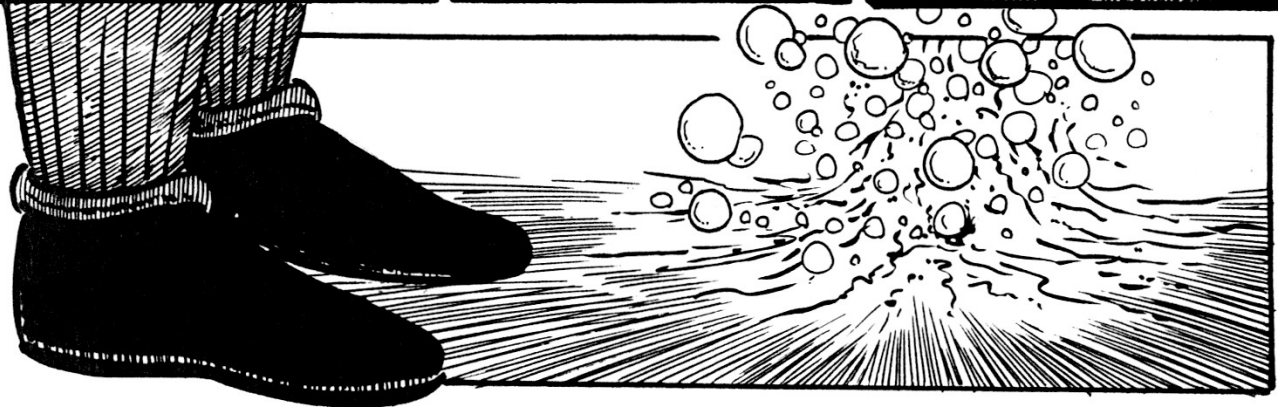
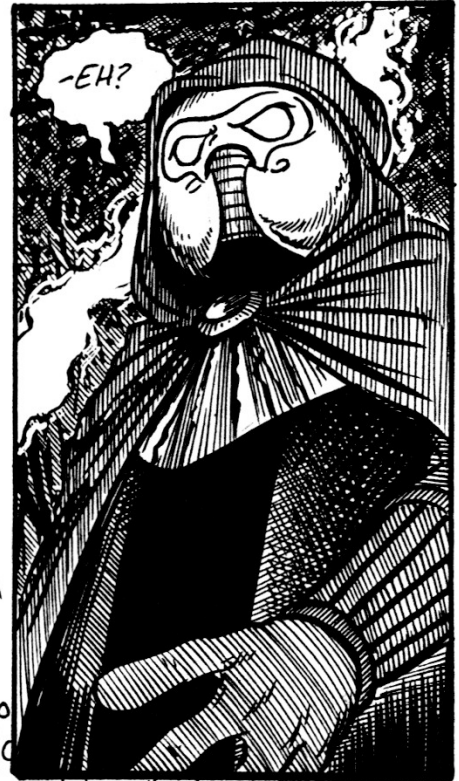
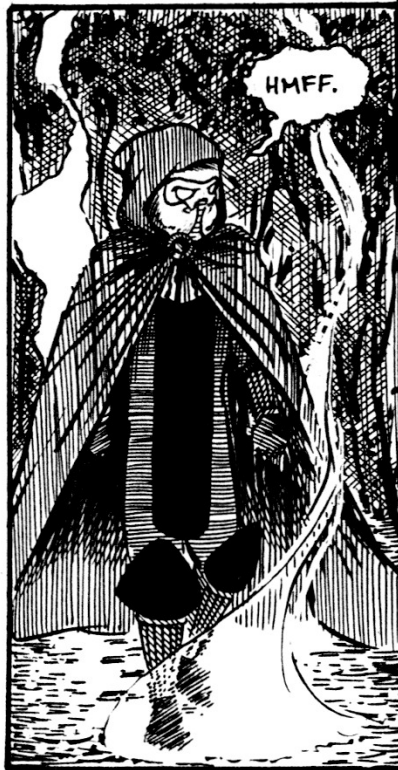


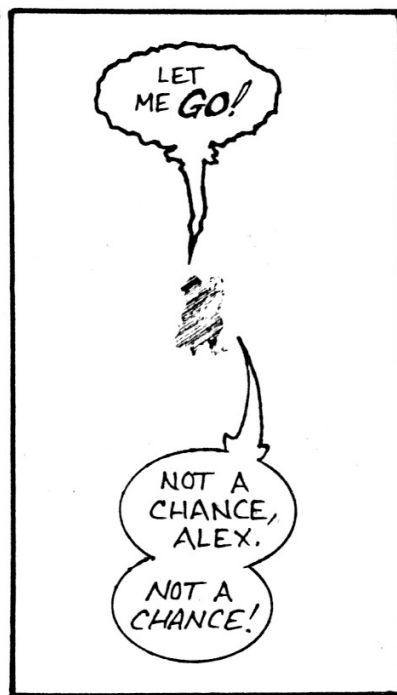
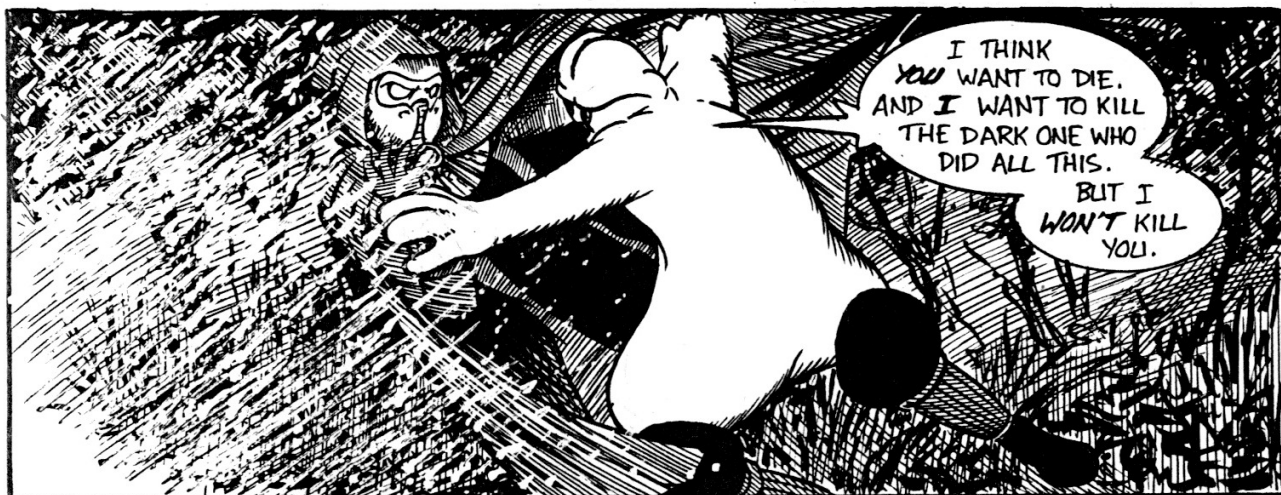
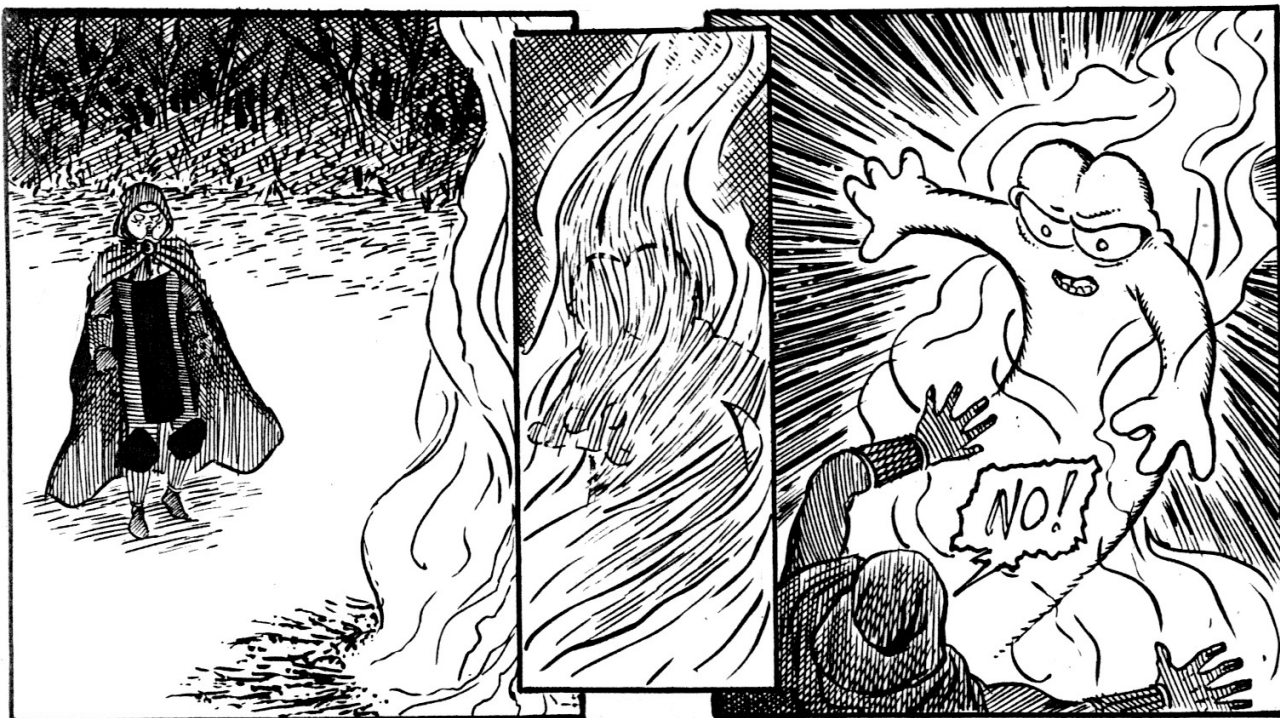




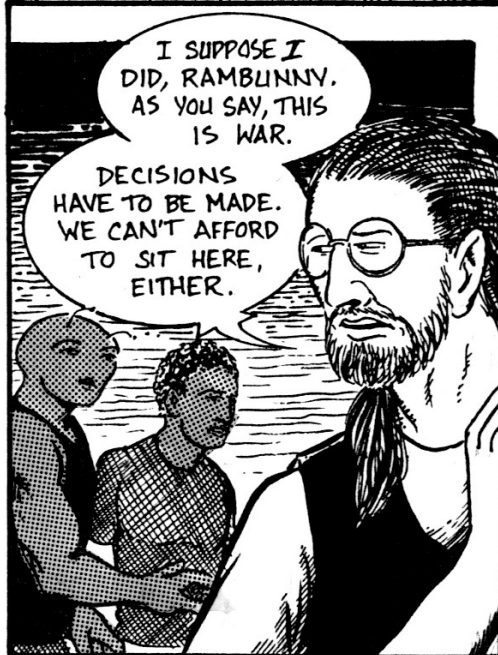
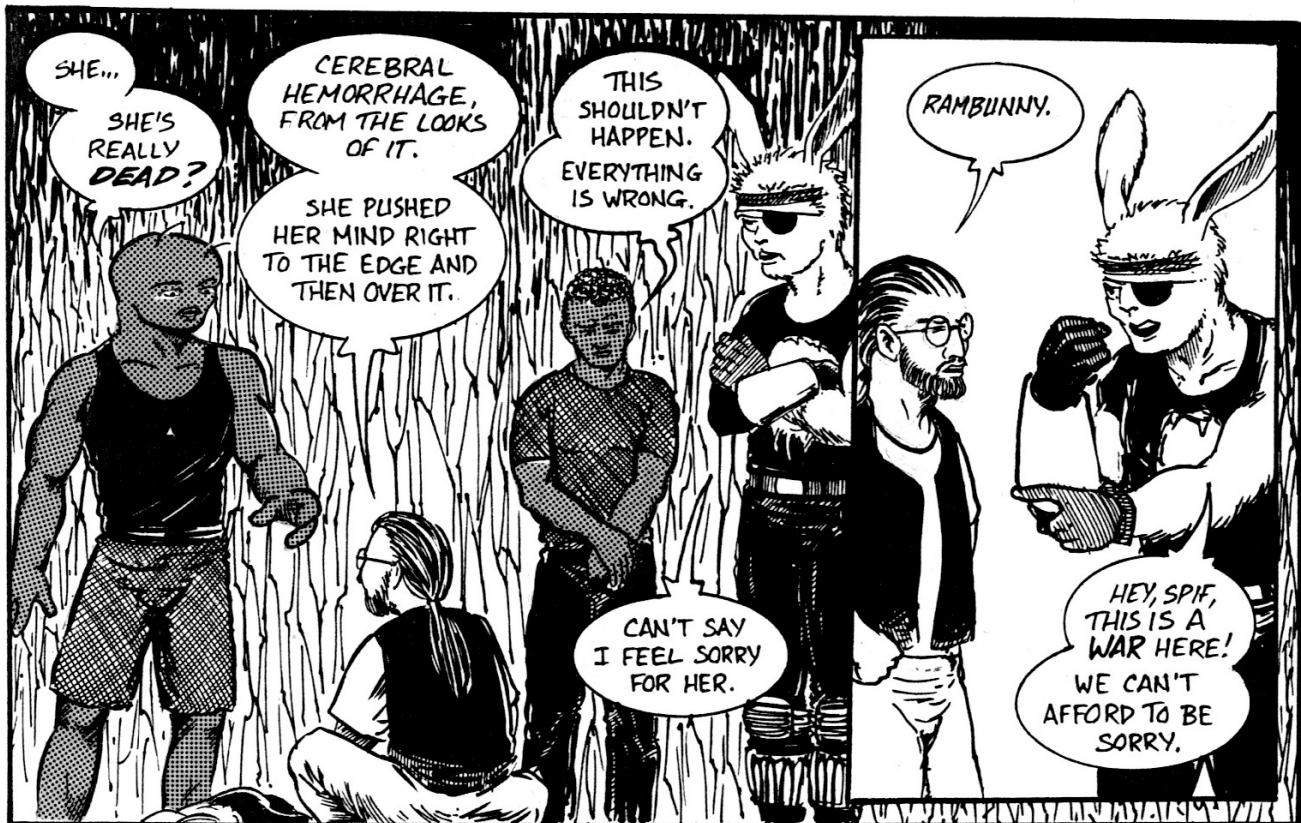


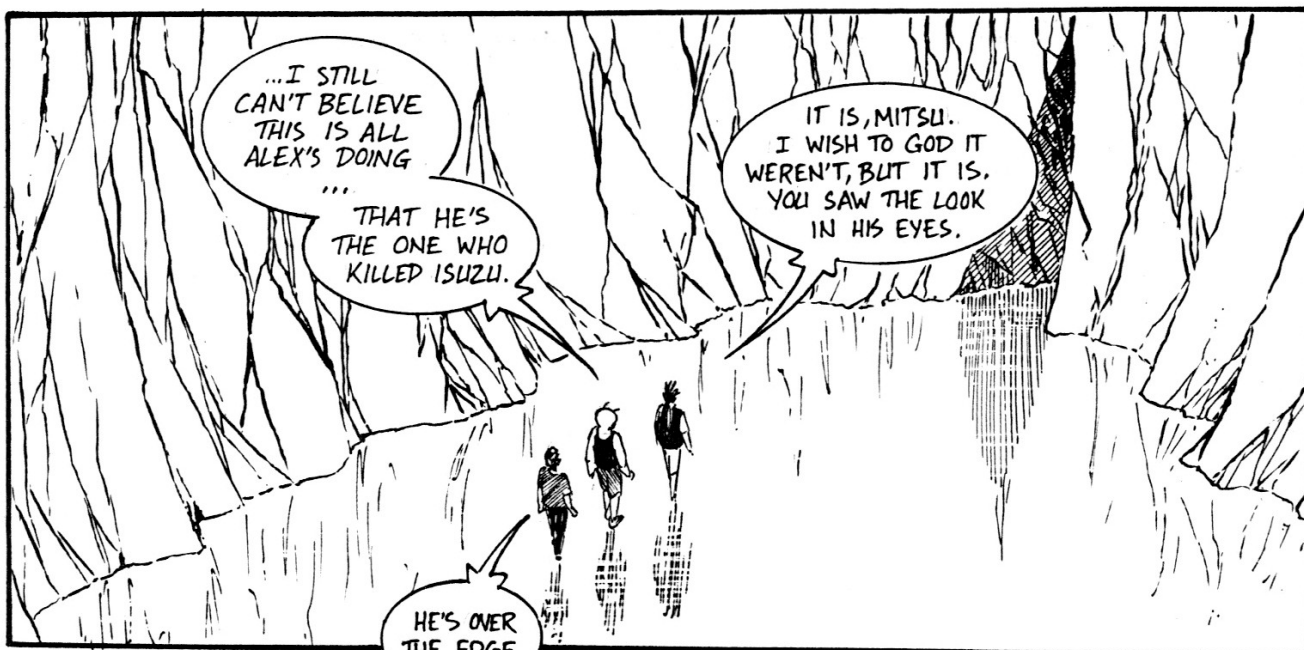


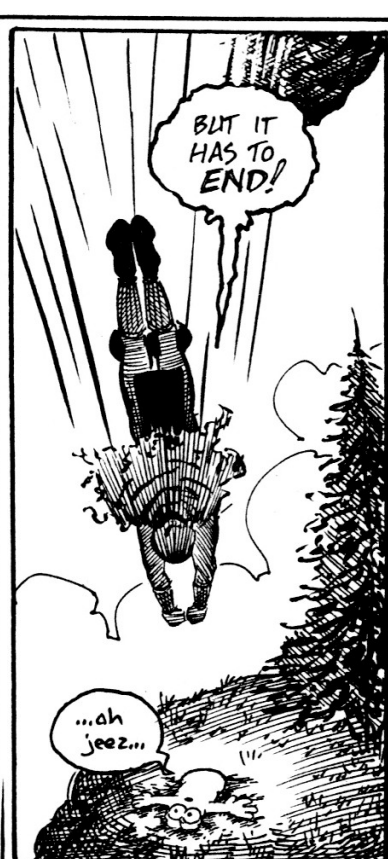
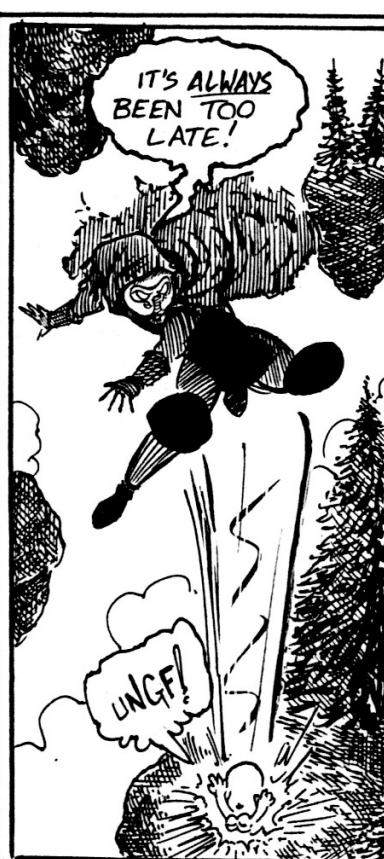
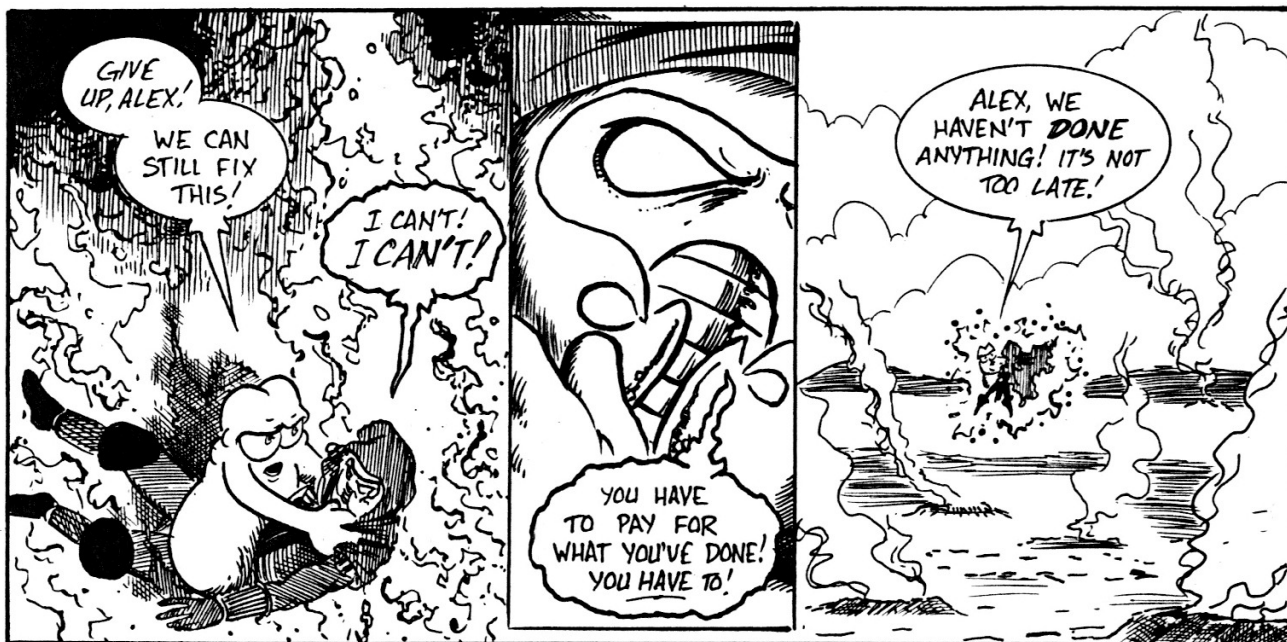
















HOLY-



IT CAN'T  
END... 'CAUSE  
YOU CAN'T  
KILL ME

AND I  
WON'T KILL  
YOU.

I WON'T.



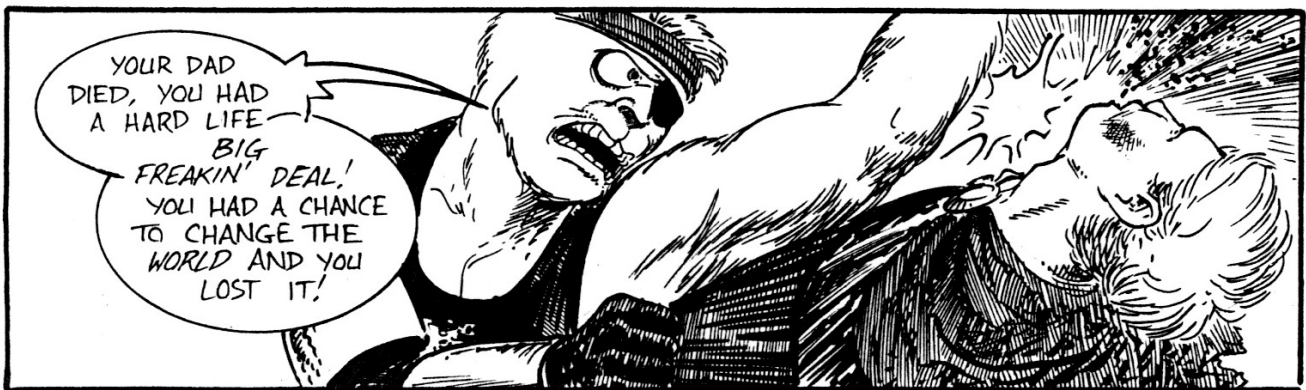
NMFR.

THEN  
I WILL,  
DAMMIT!



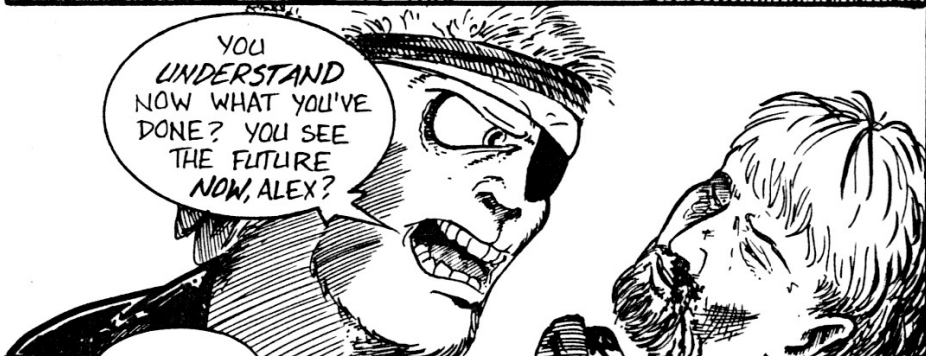
SO YOU  
FEEL LIKE A  
VICTIM, HUH,  
ALEX?

CRY ME A  
FREAKIN' RIVER,  
YOU BASTARD!

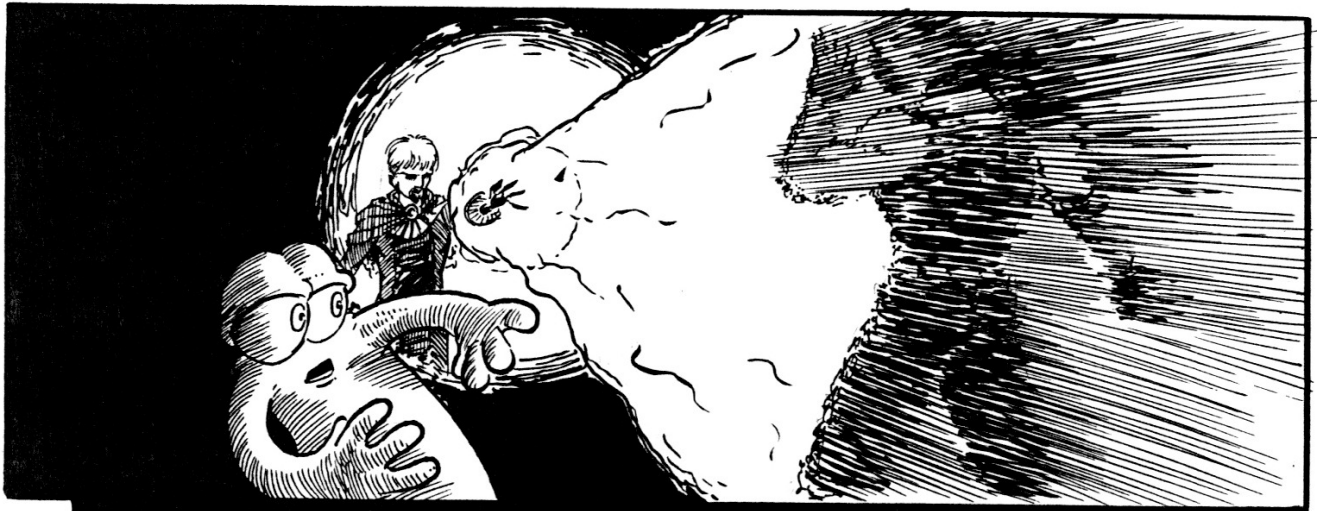


YOUR DAD  
DIED, YOU HAD  
A HARD LIFE—  
BIG  
FREAKIN' DEAL!  
YOU HAD A CHANCE  
TO CHANGE THE  
WORLD AND YOU  
LOST IT!







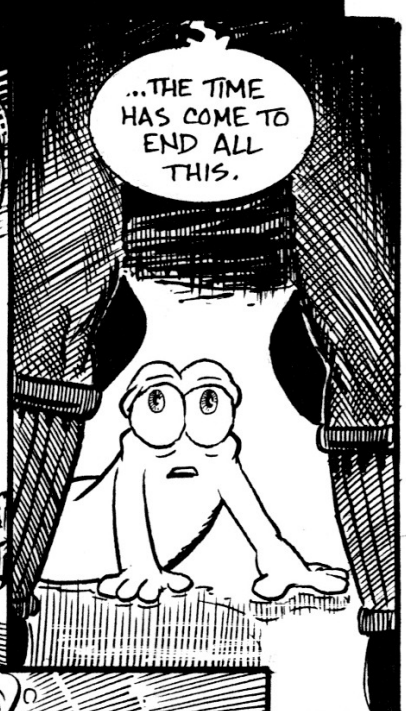


...WELL NOW,  
PROMETHEUS  
...



OH GOD,  
RAMBUNNY  
...

...hkkkk...



...THE TIME  
HAS COME TO  
END ALL  
THIS.



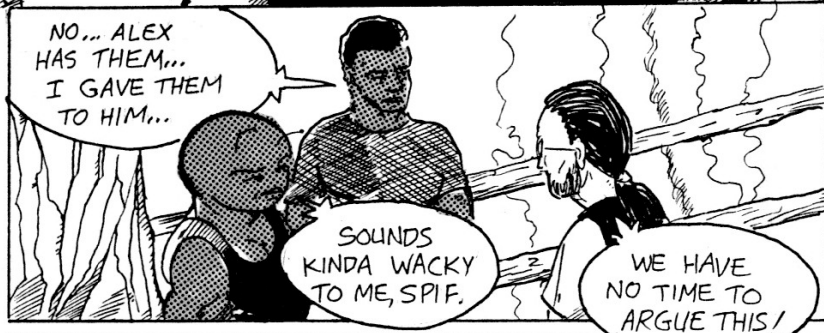
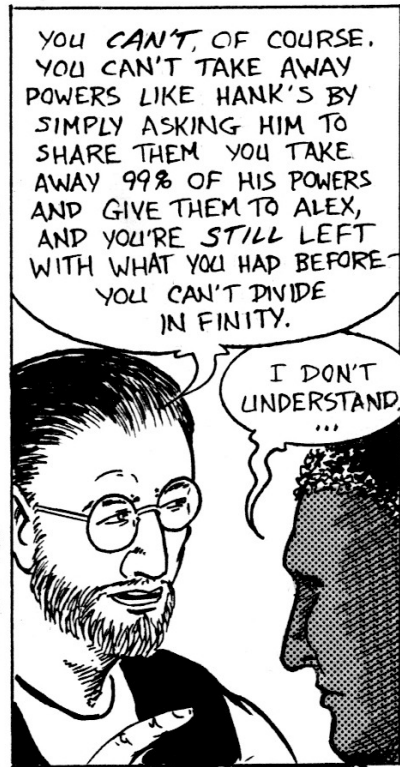
YOU SAY  
I CAN'T KILL  
YOU, PROMETHEUS,  
AND THAT MIGHT  
WELL BE TRUE.

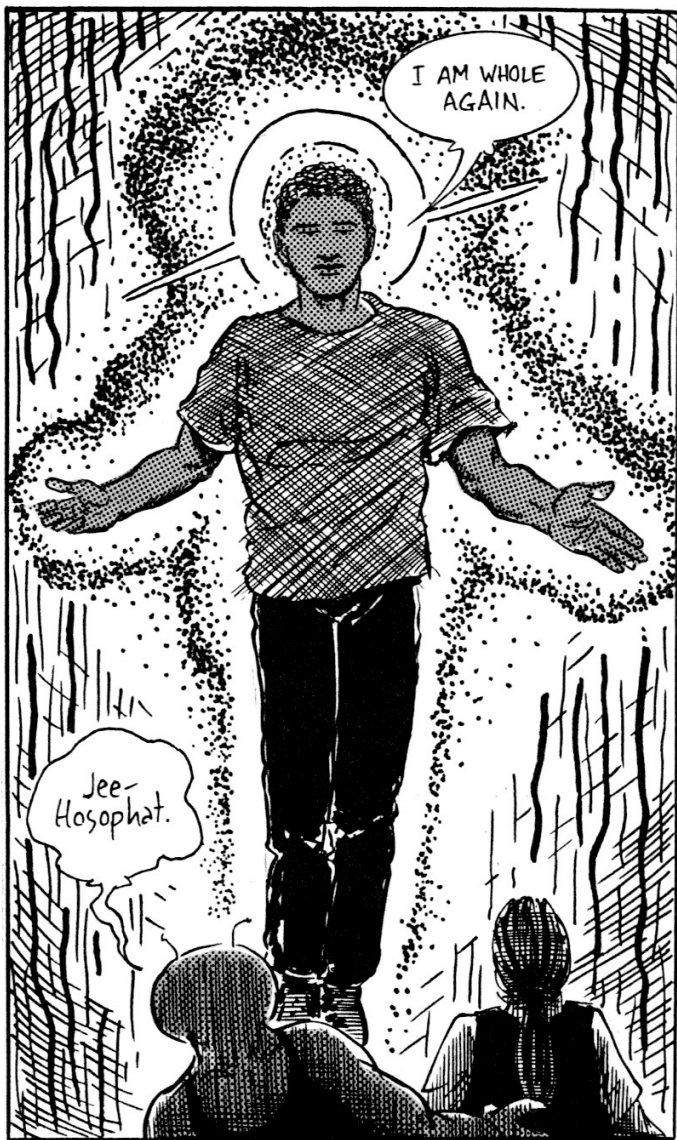


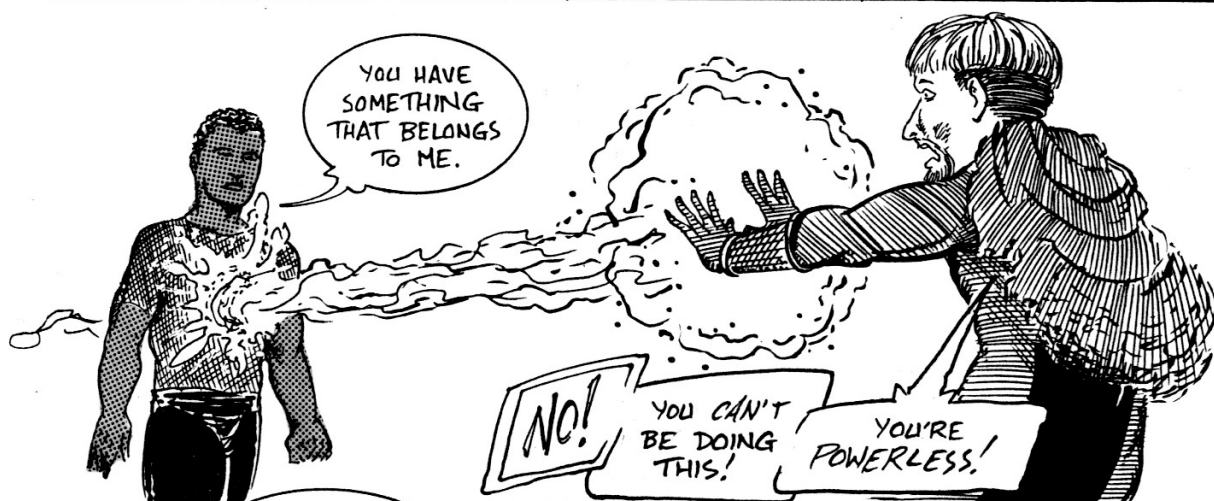




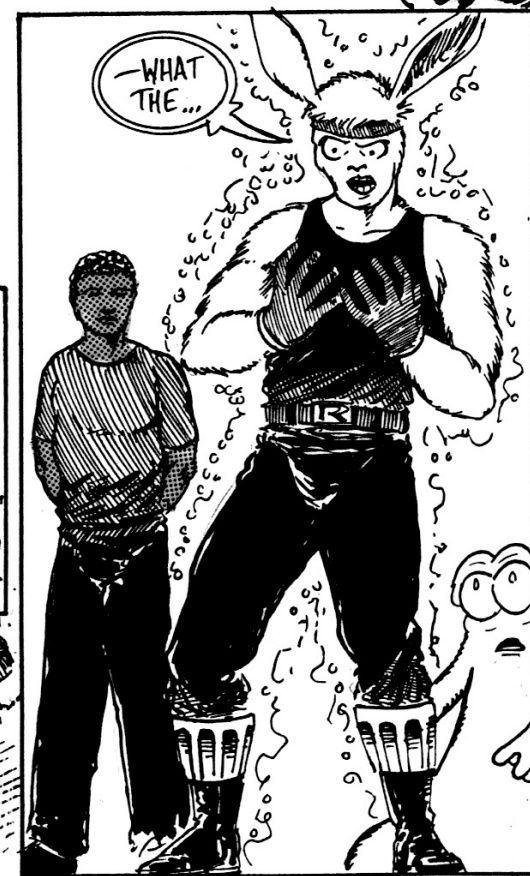




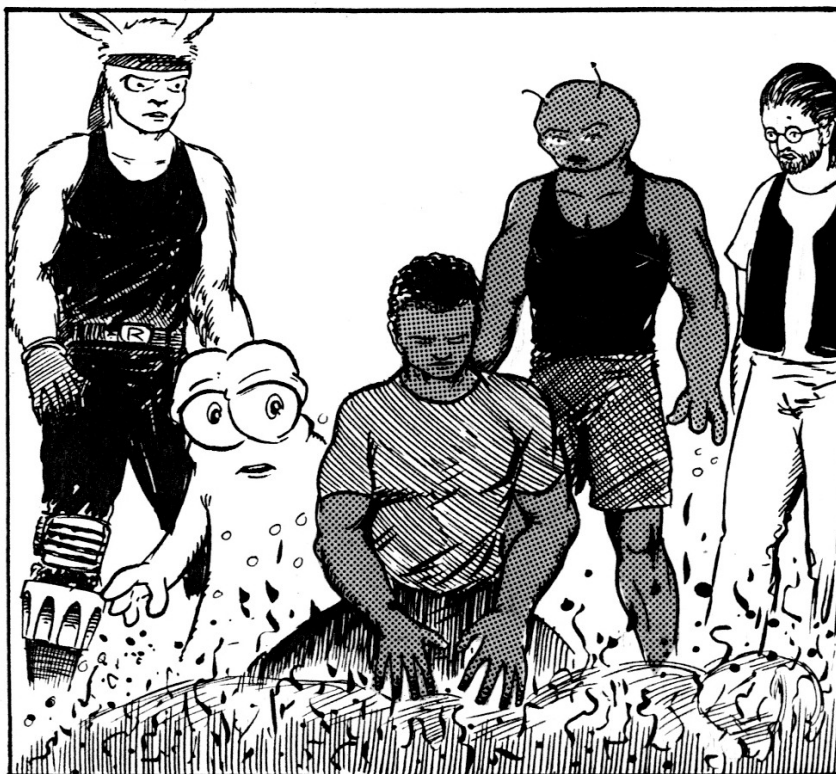
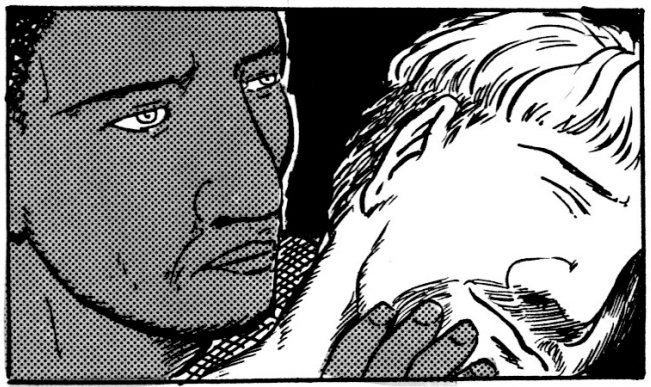




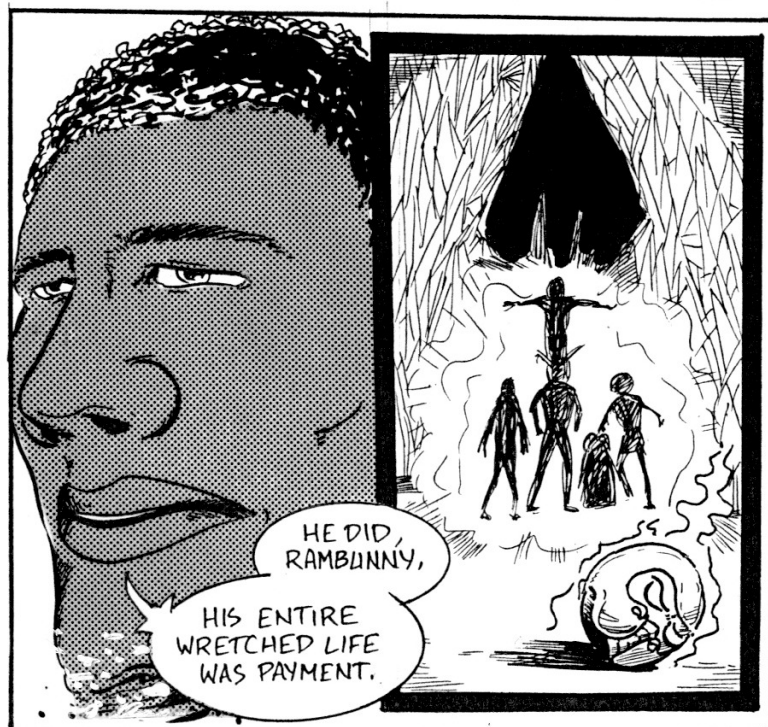


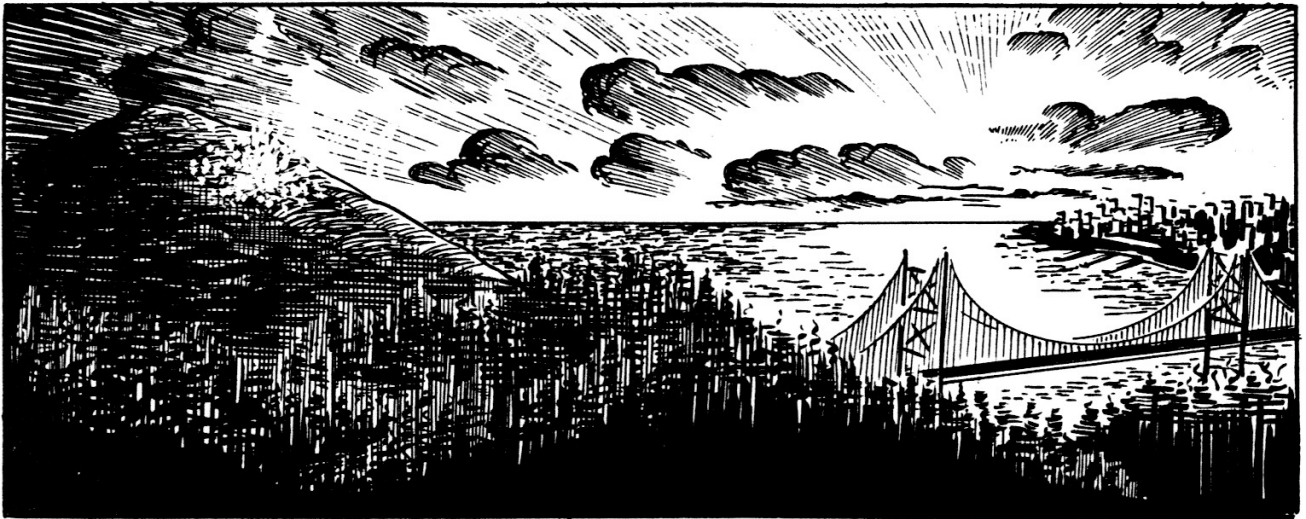












HANK... HANK, YOU SAVED RAMBUNNY, CAN YOU... YOU BRING ISUZU BACK, TOO?

I'M NOT **GOD**, MITSU.

THERE ARE SOME THINGS EVEN I CAN'T DO. RAMBUNNY WAS AT THE EDGE OF DEATH.

BUT ISUZU IS BEYOND MY POWERS TO BRING BACK.

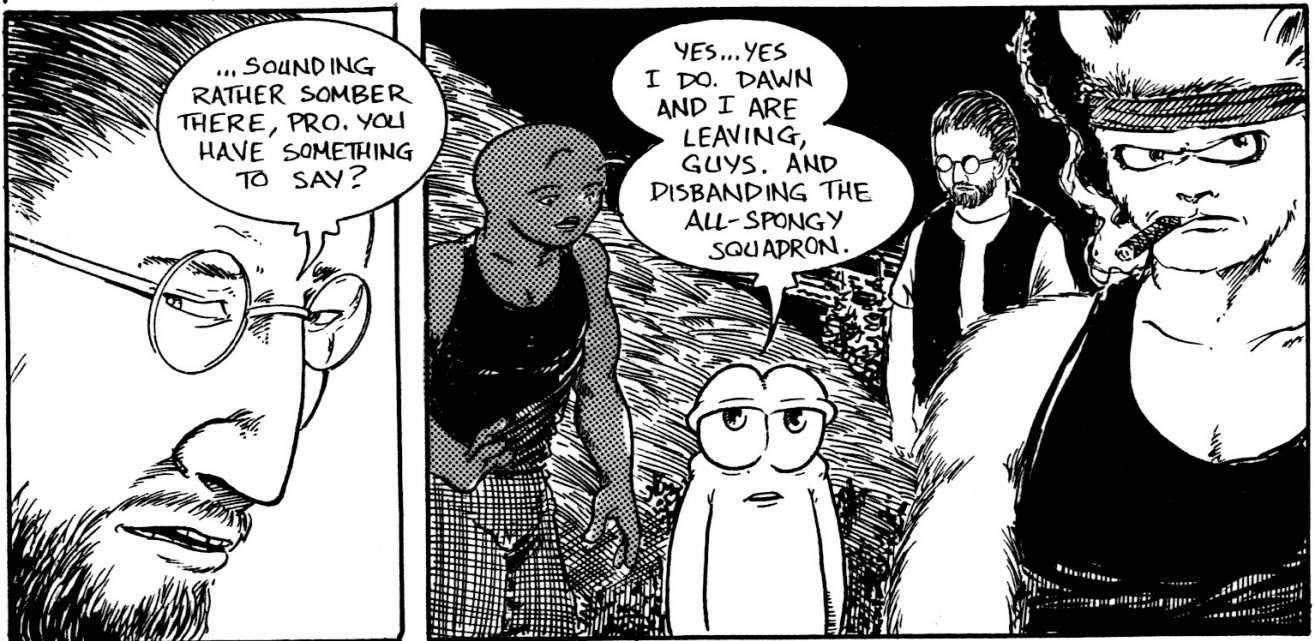
...yeah. YEAH, I KINDA FIGURED THAT. SO MUCH FOR HAPPILY EVER AFTER, HUH?

YEAH, THE BAD GUYS GET SET FREE AND THE GOOD GUYS DON'T GET CRAP.

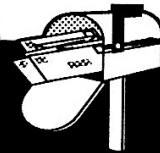
WELCOME BACK TO EARTH, MITSU.







# NEXT: AFTERMATH



*(Hokay! There's been quite a build-up of letters over the Amoeba hiatus, so I'm going to try and just run as many as I possibly can. Your comments covering Amoeba Adventures #24, 25 and Rambunny Special #1 are included. Also scattered throughout here are a sampling of the great pin-ups and sketches you've been sending in. Sheesh, you guys is the greatest! — Nik)*

**Ed Paten  
Orlando, Florida**

I just got back from vacation last night. My wife and I decided to take a road trip up to Columbia, Missouri. ...On the way up there, I decided to take along the entire collection of *Amoeba Adventures* to read when it wasn't my turn to drive. But what I found really interesting was that now that I know Alex-the-ex-inverted-man is really a villain, the whole story changed. To be honest, when I read that in issue #23 for the first time, I kind of thought you just pulled it out of your ass. But after rereading the entire series, I have come to the conclusion that either you are incredibly lucky, or just about as close as you can come to genius.

You reinforced every issue that Alex was loved by everyone, every chance you got. But the key (and to be honest I'm surprised I didn't notice this myself waaaaaay back when) was that you always made Alex unavailable whenever the Dark One showed up. Genius. Pure unadulterated genius.

Now after slamming you with all that praise, I want a simple answer to my simple question. Was it luck or was

it planned this way from the beginning?

*(A couple of folks asked this question of me. About 80% of the Dark One/Alex/Hank link has been roughly mapped out in my mind since #15 or so. — Nik)*

**Larry Johnson  
Jamaica, Massachusetts**

Thanks for sending *Amoeba Adventures* #24. This chapter, "Death," has the basic elements that have made your series such a success — the "human" and the "fantastic" which marry so well.

Beginning with the funeral service for Karate Kactus and the fine representation



Ed Paten

of feelings of loss and transition, this scene is augmented by the transition Prometheus is going through, as actually he is waking up to his true nature. I'm pleased to see this feeling represented in fiction, because in my studies of spirituality, religion and psychology this awakening to the truth is a theme explored again and again. There's danger in death, and madness that seems to strike people out of the blue. Tense, involved writing here and I see things heat up at the end.

**Jerry Smith**  
**Morristown, Tennessee**

Howdy pal, how's it going? Thanks for sending along AA #24. This letter won't be one of those praising Max's line detail or your brilliant writing ability.

Having lost loved ones in my own life, I know about how the incidents you spent with the deceased play in your mind. Even otherwise irrelevant memories seem meaningful. We want to always remember them and feel we would be letting their memory down if we can't. Was that how Pro was feeling at the funeral of Karate Kactus? I'm sure everyone was.

I enjoy Pro's new feelings of self-assurance. I'm sure we would all look at things different if we were told we were immortal. I'm wondering if Alex knows his state. He claims to have "seen" the results of his handiwork, so surely he must. Unless his vision shows of his own demise, and he has accepted or unaccepted that part. Wow, the way Alex — or should I now refer to him as "The Dark One"? — tossed around Ninja Ant, I can't imagine what hope even Rambunny has of defeating him. Besides he whipped his fuzzy hide real good already. Oh well, who knows what's lurking in your dark brain, Nik. I'm sure it'll be one heck of a trip!

**Patrick J. Lee**  
**Burbank, California**

Every single issue of *Amoeba* that I've read has been nothing short of excellent. #24 was no different. In fact, I'm running out of ways to praise this book. What hasn't been said about it?

As with previous issues, #24 has strong characterization and dialogue, fine pacing, (though I thought the funeral scene went on three pages too long) and beautiful, expressive artwork by Max.

AA also seems to have the unique ability to appeal to a wide range of readers. I don't really read any superhero books but I find AA very enjoyable, and, for the most part, believable and honest. It reminds me of the old Wolfman/Perez *Teen Titans* stories. (And I really do mean that as high praise.)

The series works because Nik believes in his characters and has invested a good part of his life in nurturing them and, now particularly, it is really something to see him bring closure to something he's clearly spent a lot of time setting up.

**Joe Gravel**  
**Scarborough, Ontario, Canada**

Thanks for sending me issue #24 of *Amoeba Adventures*. I give a lot of credit to both you and Max for putting out consistently enjoyable issues with very interesting characters.

Even though I've come into it fairly late in the series you've crafted your stories in such a way that it's easy to get into the flow of events. Your strong characterization makes the heroes very accessible.

I enjoyed what you guys put together so much that I did a pin-up that I'm sending along. Hope you didn't mind but I used a little artistic license and gave Werechuck a tail. By the way, I've got a new respect for Max for doing all that cross-hatching (whew!)

**Tom Casey**  
**Portland, Indiana**

It's with mixed emotions that I respond to your recent announcement that *Amoeba Adventures* is going to graduate from the small press world into full-fledged independent status. (Full-fledged independent? Isn't that something like working a job as a full-time temp?)

Of course, there's absolutely no doubt that you guys have earned the opportunity to bring *Amoeba* to a larger audience. The series is consistently entertaining,





**Matt Kelleigh**

funny, surprising, and technically accomplished. It'll be exciting to see where you can take the plotlines and characters in a new format, and the higher-quality production values should be a marvelous forum for Max's many talents.

And yet...

And yet, I'm sorry to see the small press version of *Amoeba* go.

Subscribing to a quality little magazine like this one is sort of like being one of the few people who know about a really great neighborhood bar that outsiders haven't discovered. You know, the sort of bar where the beer is extra cheap and extra cold, where the popcorn has actually been popped on the same day, where you can carry on a conversation with the bartender or another patron without shouting, where you can get a good burger at 2 a.m., where they still have pinball machines with bells and bumpers and a jukebox with which you can sing along.

Every time I've found a place like that over the years, somebody's eventually come along and turned it into a sports bar, or a line dance bar, or a pick-up bar. One even became a laundromat once, for

heaven's sake (The suds were never the same after that).

So it's with some concern that I await the new look of *Amoeba Adventures*. I'd hate to go into a comic book store someday (not that we really have one in Portland; so please do us out in rural America a favor and get us information on how we can subscribe once you've made the jump), and find *Amoeba Adventures* on the shelf, only to find out once I've

bought it and opened it that the characters have lost their edge, that the irony has been replaced by extra dollops of "WHOOOM!" and "K-THANG!" sound effects, that the plots are more predictable and that Max has dropped his freer-form instincts in an effort to be accessible to a larger audience.

I don't think all this is going to happen, mind you. I've read *Amoeba* long enough to believe in you two, and I'm going to stay optimistic that this jump up the ladder is evolution, not just change. I wish you all the best, no matter what happens. Hope you make a fortune, or whatever passes for it in the comics world these days.

But know this: If you turn my favorite comic book fungus bar into a comic book fern bar, I'm going to have to find another neighborhood joint to hang out in. Although what's the point? Once I do, they'll probably turn it into a coffee bar or something...

*(Thanks for your thought-provoking letter, Tom. Even though things have*



Joe Gravel

*changed a lot for AA since you wrote it, I really enjoyed your thoughts on "selling out." While next issue will be the last of AA in any form for now, it's good to know we've made an impact on our readers.)*

**Eric Hess**  
**Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania**

Thanks for *Amoeba Adventures* #24. Jeez, that's gotta be the scariest cover since #15. Good work by Max!

Can't believe Isuzu's really gone! Interesting to read your (quite enjoyable) interview in *Small Press Feedback*; one of my theories was that you wanted to take Pro in a less "superheroey" direction in the full-size book. (But come on, man; you could've had KK just go on sabbatical...)

Especially enjoyed: Karate Kactus's face on page 1, panels 7 and 8 (nice!)... "It's all going to end now. Now matter what." ...Seeing Kyoko and whatsisname again (not that I'm jealous of him!)... "It just hit me — I'll never get a chance to tell him that."... "Slip of the tongue." (heh!)... The Dark One's surprise attack on Mitsu (really surprised me, too!)... "You were in my head" (at last, plot threads begin to come together. Yee-hah!)... Dawn slowly growing sadder while talking with Hank... "I look like me again"... Spif's distractedness (for lack of a better word) back in the Amoebacave (really brings home how The Dark One has demoralized the team!)... Hank's seizure (jeeeeeez!)... The Dark One's funny-yet-frighteningly quick dispatch of Mitsu (you two are executing flawlessly here!)... and of course, the thrilling return of everyone's favorite lapin superhero on the final page! Can't wait for next ish!

Constructive criticism: Max might want to keep a closer eye on proportion. I'm starting to see too many instances where characters' elbows fall too far above their waists (Hank on page 13, Rambunny on the last page, etc.). Other than that, everything looks great!

*(...Also, here's comments by a few of you on our long-delayed, finally-available*

*Rambunny one-shot adventure by myself and Ron Gravelle:)*

**Tony Lorenz**  
**Orlando, Florida**

Thanks for your brand new *Rambunny* special. I really enjoyed this book. The story was refreshing. I know that it had to be fun to write something different. I feel the same way when I work on a side project. There was some air of sadness to this book, because it was the book Eric Hampton was inking when he was tragically murdered. I didn't know Eric that well (couple of letters) but he definitely was a major small press talent that is still sorely missed.

Now, back to the book itself. The story was the strong part of *Rambunny*, but the art wasn't half bad either. I like Ron Gravelle's artwork but there were some areas that really seemed rushed. This is small press, no deadlines, I really wished he would have taken a little more time with it (look who's talking, Mr. Grammar himself). I really thought the best art in the book was your own excellent cover!

**Sherman Burnett**  
**Monticello, Kentucky**

*Rambunny: Unacceptable Losses* was truly different from your usual fare over in *Amoeba Adventures*. Here you touched on the dark side not only of *Rambunny*, but of mankind in general.

Our pasts shape us and we may do some really crummy things (like join covert government agencies and kill people for a living), but we are capable of change even if other people don't believe that we are capable of such things. So *Rambunny* was able to do the right thing and not kill Blythe, even though he felt it was something he should do. That shows he has grown as a person and is able to accept people for their worth even if they are worthless.

I think what bothers me most about Fish and his ilk is how they waited for Blythe to grow old before deciding to off him. He's killed thousands over the course of his life and yet only when he's dying and going off the deep end by



killing a lot more do they take action. Rambunny should have cleaned house with the whole lot of them.

I also think that Rambunny shouldn't have ignored the envelope. I'm guessing by what Fish said that Rambunny either has a son he doesn't know about or that Fish had information about Rambunny's parents. Guess we will never know, huh?

*(...Finally, here's a few early comments on Amoeba #25, which has only been out a few weeks as I assemble this!)*

**Rick Howe**  
**Springdale, Arkansas**

I enjoyed *Amoeba Adventures* #25. It makes pretty good sense for such a complicated storyline. I think it's an unstated assumption that Alex is far more unhinged than he realizes, since how he's ending up is somehow a far cry from where he started — in terms of motivational consistency; that is, following a consistent course of action, not straying into disastrous sidetracks. There's just got to be a more sensible way of coping with life than all the wrong turns he has taken.

But the real howler for me is his statement, "I hated Karate Kactus most of all... his hypocritical righteousness, his outdated chivalry." That's a terribly unjust statement, one which deserves to be challenged. A great line for the story, of course; I only mean it's an unjust thing for the character Alex to say. I sense that it links in some way to Alex's feelings toward his father; either he has an unsuspected ambivalence toward his father, or perhaps he resents Karate Kactus just for being alive when his father is dead, and considers that unfair.

As for your decision to stick with the small press format for *Amoeba Adventures* for a while longer — I tend to applaud it for this reason: small press is steadily gaining recognition as an important part of comicdom. AA is one of the most solid small press titles, and having it continue on that footing could be a significant, influential choice. It will help to further establish the respectability of small press, and I don't think this will

reflect badly on you in the long run. And I don't think your art is likely to be much of a disappointment even if Max Ink is a hard act to follow.

*(Rick, you've really done a good job evaluating the character of Alex as I've tried to write him — as is obvious after this issue, he is insane and obviously has the knack for just making his life worse. The "disastrous sidetracks" is a perfect analogy for what happened to him — and how sometimes trying to reach the most well-intentioned of goals can lead you directly into your own private hell.)*

**Terry Flippo**  
**Mt. Airy, Maryland**

After an eleven-month hiatus *Amoeba Adventures* once again graces mailboxes across this great nation of ours. Nik and Max pick up this issue without missing a beat, as our crew are at the mercy of the Dark One/Alex. This story is your basic villain-explains-his-motives story. What sets this one apart, though, is the truly inspired and heartfelt scripting by Nik. I had no trouble sympathizing and even understanding the events that brought Alex to this point in his life. Love is one of the most powerful forces known to man. Whether or not this story is consistent with Alex's early appearances, I don't know. I do know I enjoyed the heck out of this story and can't wait to see how it all turns out. This book really takes me back to my days of reading comics as a kid.

**Tim Corrigan**  
**Houghton, New York**

Thanks for the package of fantastic comics! I'm blown away by your devotion to this concept and these characters. They've become so well-developed over the years, their identities are crystal clear — better than a lot of the muddy writing we're getting in pro comics these days.

Nik, you've evolved into a huge talent, not merely in the execution of your work, but in the quality of your thinking. ...This is one of the best things ever to come out of small press!



# THE UFO CHECKLIST



The United Fanzine Organization is a group of self-publishers dedicated to creating high-quality small press comics. Here's a list of our latest releases as of January 1998. For information on the UFO, contact our current chairman: Bob Elinskas, 1805 Girard St., Utica, NY 13501.

VISIT THE UFO ON THE WEB! <http://www.geocities.com/SoHo/3018>



**A DIFFERENT PACE #1:** 16 pages with color cover, \$1.00 from David Hedgecock, P.O. Box 91426, San Diego, CA 92169. Meet the lovely Lily and her motley crew of space pirates, as they embark on an epic quest... if they can stop crashing vehicles long enough to get to it. High adventure and hilarity from the Hedgecock brothers!



**A.G. GRAPHIX PRESENTS #1:** 44 pages, \$2.00 from Anthony Gray, 1103 West St., Utica, NY 13501. Meet the heroes and villains of the A.G. universe,

as rendered by an all-star collection of artists: Max Ink, Daniel Nauenburg, Randy Reynaldo, W.C. Pope, and many more!



**A.G. GRAPHIX PRESENTS #6:** 20 pages, \$1.50 from Anthony Gray, 1103 West St., Utica, NY 13501. Anthony Gray and Dave Tryzenski present a

superhero tale with a difference. Can even the mighty Gemstone prevail against the menaces of prejudice and poverty? Plus a powerful backup tale from Andrew (RIB) Ford!



**AMOEBIA ADVENTURES #25:** 32 pages, \$2.50 from Nik Dirga, P.O. Box 64, Oakdale, CA 95361-0064. The anthropomorphic super-

team hits their milestone 25th issue! The Dark One stands revealed, with the All-Spongy Squadron at his mercy. How did he gain his powers? Why did a friend turn traitor? The answers are here!



**AXEL-n-ALEX #4:** 24 pages, \$1.50 from Terry Flippo, 205 Breezewood Ct., Mt. Airy, MD 21771. The robot Axel has cut a deal with the government, but the renegade Peacekeeper isn't interested in negotiation! It's metal against metal as the two 'bots slug it out! Meanwhile, young Alex has a showdown of his own, when he's cornered by the neighborhood bully!



**BURP BOY & UPCHUCK #4:** 16 pages, \$1.00 from S.A. McClung, 537 S. University #6, Norman, OK 73069.

Jason Marcy's Powerwus guest-stars, as Burp Boy confronts the asinine menace of... Buttiac! And if he can't crush our heroes, The Liefeldian can! Off-beat buffoonery as you like it, plus more small press cameos than you can shake a stapler at!



**SNIPER #1:** 28 pages with color cover, \$1.50 from Tony Lorenz, 8708 Friendship Ct., Tampa, FL 33634. Forged in the crucible of Viet Nam,

Roman Martin is the deadliest foe crime ever had! But can he turn his back on his violent past when a friend calls him out for one last job? Gritty drama from the creator of FUTURO TIERRA!

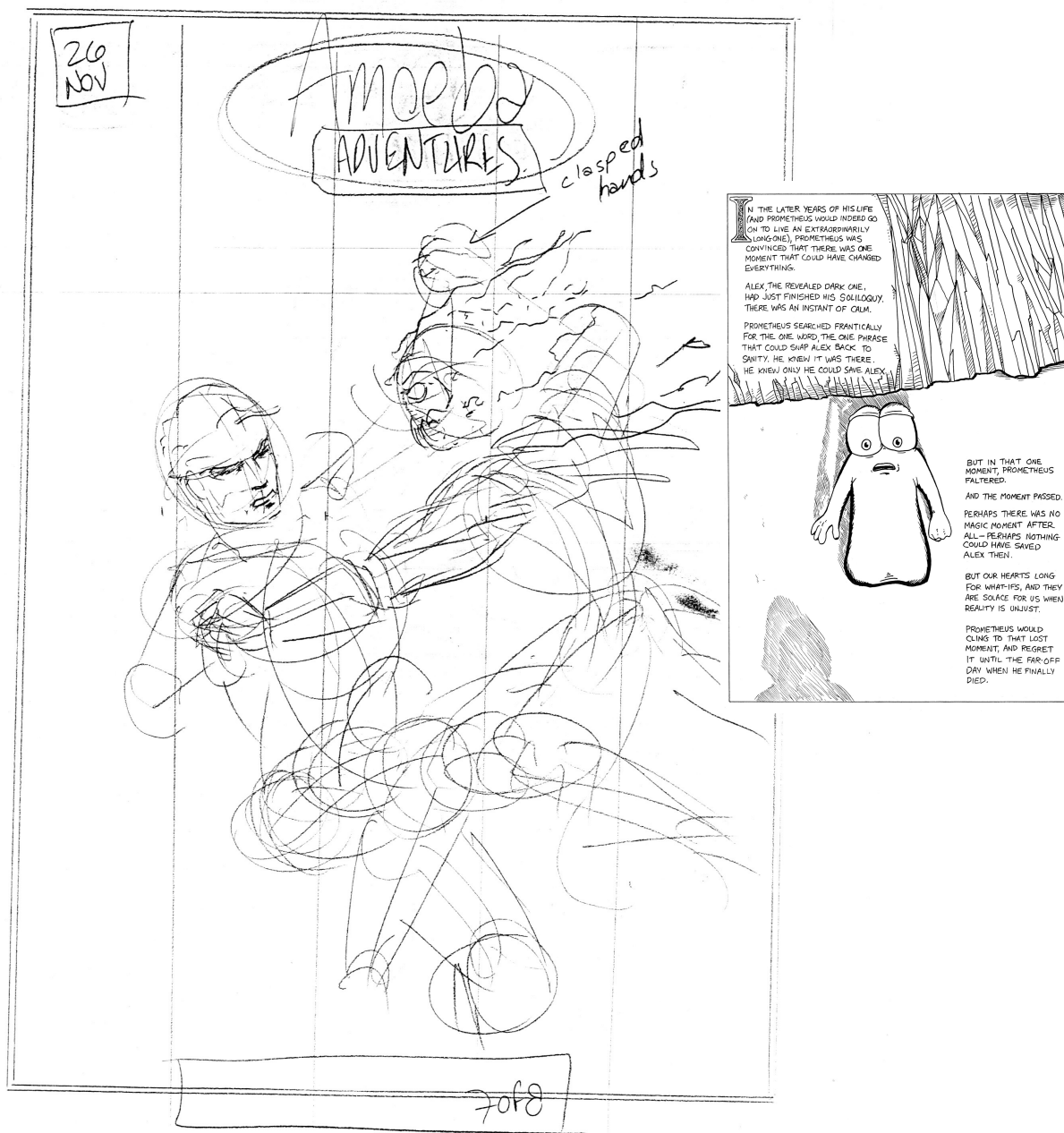
**TETRAGRAMMATON FRAGMENTS:** The official newsletter of the United Fanzine Organization, with news, reviews, and commentary from talented (and opinionated!) members. For a sample issue, send \$2.00 to Chairman Bob Elinskas, 1805 Girard St., Utica, NY 13501.

# NEXT ISSUE





# SPECIAL 2020 BONUS SECTION



Amoeba Adventures #26 was the final issue with Max Ink's art (he did about 75% of it, I finished it off). Above is a cool sketch of what I later turned into the cover.

The "interval" page 1 of this issue (top right) was done to ease the flow, as #25/26 were originally meant to be one giant issue before that became a little ridiculously unwieldy to do a 60-page small press book. Although it was just done to cover for the break, I actually really liked that one page and its omnipotent narrator Nik (a device I rarely used). It seemed a fitting little overture to the final act of Amoeba Adventures.





...The only flaw with SPCE, and I imagine if Tim were still with us he'd agree, was that it was produced on newsprint with an insanely small font of 6pt or so! More than a little hard to read for aging eyes like mine, but I've done my best to clean his article up a little bit for this PDF.

## "A SPECIAL SPCE SPOTLIGHT ON NIK DIRGA'S... AMOEBA ADVENTURES!!"

"First you've got PROMETHEUS, and he's the whaddaya call, Catalyst for the whole shebang. He's an amoeba, you know, a protoplasm! He came down to this city, Spongopolis, on a weird world called Earth-Spongy from outer space one day, and became real famous there...no one's really sure why, that's just the way things happen, right? Then there's RAMBUNNY, who's like Peter Rabbit with a bazooka...he's basically a good guy who's not a very nice guy, if you see what I'm saying?

Of course, you can't forget DR. SPIFF, who's this doctor guy who also invents all these gadgets and fights crime with them when he's not doing doctor-type things. He's the kinda' guy who ends up wearing a lampshade on his head at parties.

There's also NINJA ANT and KARATE KACTUS, who are cousins, even if they don't happen to be from the same species. They're both oriental kung-fu masters. NINJA ANT, whose real name is Mitsubishi, is the young know-it-all and KARATE KACTUS, also called Isuzu, is the old master."

- This from the opening editorial in AMOEBA ADVENTURES #1, thus introducing Small Press and the comics community at large, to one of the longest running and most off-the-wall supergroups of all time - THE ALL SPONGY SQUADRON, appearing in AMOEBA ADVENTURES for the better part of a decade, from Nik Dirga, with a lot of help from his friends!

In all my years of small press involvement I have never seen a comic like this, and I have seldom seen anything to match Nik Dirga's devotion to this concept. He took some of the most unlikely characters imaginable and wove them into a book that began "working" almost immediately.

Following is a brief synopsis of each issues storyline.

● ISSUE #1 - Ninja Ant and Prometheus head for the waterfront to break up a drug ring, where they meet The Visitor, another hero. Ninja Ant and The Visitor confront each other, when The Visitor is knocked out by an explosion. They carry the unconscious hero to their headquarters where Dr. Spiff (origin told in SPIFF #1, 1994) discovers that the Visitor is from another dimension, and that his presence here is having sort of a matter/anti-matter impact on our world, causing reality to crumble. The Visitor awakes and takes the name MANSLAUGHTER. He seeks AGNUS DEI, an evil sorcerer and Manslaughter's arch nemesis, who transported Manslaughter to Earth-Spongy. Agnus Dei is heading up a revolt in the distant country of Drudgeland, ruled by HERR HEINOUS, who fires a missile at our heroes incoming craft and, presumably, blows them to smithereens!

This all picks up where PROMETHEUS #1-6 left off some years earlier. It's all a bit tongue-in-cheek at first, but these characters have depth and personalities. Clearly, even right from the first issue, something unique was unfolding, and the ALL SPONGY SQUADRON would not let Nik Dirga rest.

● ISSUE #2 features a Fantastic Four cover swipe and a story that opens with Herr Heinous' henchmen taking the "bodies" of our heroes from the wreckage of their craft. Prometheus has been blown, unseen, into a tree and he follows to

Herr Heinous' castle. Manslaughters force field saved them. Prometheus sneaks in through a drainpipe to rescue his comrades. Chased through the castle, the All Spongy Squadron, reunited, find Manslaughter, but they are trapped in an air-tight room by Herr Heinous. Prometheus slips under the door and releases our heroes, whereupon they battle Herr Heinous, track down Agnus Dei, only to find that he is holding Rambunny captive deep within the castle. It's a very involved story with lots of twists, turns, and wit. The bantering between the characters is occasionally hilarious, and Nik's subtle dry humor permeates this entire series.

● ISSUE #3 reveals Manslaughter is Agnus Dei's son! Herr Heinous bursts into the room and blasts Agnus Dei who recovers quickly and turns Heinous into a...DUCK!? Agnus calls forth a host of demons to fight our heroes while he tackles Manslaughter. An epic battle ensues and Agnus Dei is finally defeated but at the cost of Manslaughters own life. The epilogue introduces RAOUL- THE BOY COCKROACH, a character Nik created in 1986 when in the 8th grade, and it also introduces THE GORILLA GANG, who would reappear in the course of the series.

● ISSUE #4, with the first trilogy storyline over, plows onward. Our heroes return to Spongopolis. Ninja Ant and Karate Kactus fly to Japan, while Rambunny and Prometheus tackle the Gorilla Gang led by King Krong, with a little assist from Raoul-Boy Cockroach. Flash suddenly to this insane creature that lives in a dimension suspended between words, at home in a team of concepts and ideas - a hint of things to come? They return to Spongy-headquarters, Mr. Spiff's townhouse, where Mr. Spiff is working on his battle armour. Raoul weasels his way into the group. Prometheus goes to a restaurant for coffee and meets a priest to whom he finds himself confessing his confusion. Meanwhile, Mr. Spiff has come up with a gizmo that'll jam the Gorilla Gangs transporter (which they use to escape their crime scenes), and they head off for the big battle with King Krong, who is finally defeated when he is run down by a truckload of bananas, and the Squadron wins the day. The characters do a lot of thinking, are becoming more introspective, taking on new depths with each issue.

● ISSUE #5 - up until now, Nik has been doing all the art and stories, but with #5 he turns the art chores over to the very capable John Hurley, and this is the last legal-sized issue. With their headquarters destroyed by a bomb, our heroes retire to the Prometheus Cave, last seen in PROMETHEUS #3. The phone rings and they are invited to appear on the David Letterman show. The Asbestos Mushroom, an old foe, is responsible for bombing their old headquarters, and he attacks them, inside a giant robot, on the set of David Letterman, live before millions of viewers. Meanwhile, Prometheus goes back to talk again with the mysterious priest only to find that things are not always what they seem. This all leads into DETAILS OF DESIGN, a storyline spanning issues #6-10. A 2nd story takes us to Japan with Ninja Ant and Karate Kactus. We go to Ninja Ants parents house and meet his ancient grandfather. Ninja Ant gets drawn into a duel with a rival for the love of his life when news reaches them from America



Tim Corrigan's column in Comics Buyer's Guide introduced me to the small press scene and his review of #1 (reprinted in the Amoeba Adventures #2 digital PDF) was a complete game-changer for me making my silly comics available to a wider audience. It seems fitting that he was there at the end as well as the beginning. Again, thanks Tim, for everything!

that Prometheus has vanished! Humor and drama in a perfect blend.

● **ISSUE #6**, the first digest issue, begins **DETAILS OF DESIGN**, written and drawn by Nik Dirga. Our heroes take up the search for Prometheus with some help from Trochi, a hired psychic, who transports them to the dimension of the demon-guy, **MASTER MACABRE** - genuinely one of the creepiest villains ever, with a twisted sense of humor that'll make you laugh out loud.

● **ISSUE #7**, also completely by Nik, we find that Master Macabre, with a wave of his hand, has split up Rambunny, Mr. Spiff, and Raoul the Boy Cockroach, and scattered them throughout the dimension he rules over as a demi-god. Rambunny battles a giant named Oscar who divides into two every time he gets hit. Mr. Spiff battles the Inverted Man, and Raoul loses his head! But it's all in their minds as Master Macabre toys with them. Meanwhile, Prometheus has been delivered to some very nasty scientists with designs of their own.

● In **ISSUE #8** Prometheus is being held captive by Dr. Isak Crane, who wants to use Pro's powers to create a race of supermen. Two of his group of scientists - Dawn Strauss and Hank Jensen - turn against the Doctor and try to free Prometheus. Crane catches them in the act and uses THEM as guinea pigs in his experiment to transfer Prometheus' powers to humans.

● **ISSUE #9**. Meanwhile, the other members of the All Spongy Squadron reunite in Spongopolis, while scientists Strauss and Jensen gain super powers as a result of their exposure to Prometheus' energies. Prometheus divides into a hundred (amoeba's will do that sorta' thing), and declares war on the scientists. Anthony Gray's inks lend a very appealing Dick Ayers look to this issue's art. Jensen becomes a new

● **ISSUE #10**, with inks by Tony Lorenz and Jason Wright, concludes **DETAILS OF DESIGN**. Spunky Ant, Ninja Ant's brother stows away in his suitcase from Japan. Mr. Spiff creates a gizmo that transports our nine heroes to Master Macabre's dimension for the epic final showdown. Brilliant dialogue and characterization, by this time the characters are as familiar as my own easy chair, and I find myself deeply involved with them.

● **ISSUE #10** brings the series to new heights with Max Ink as penciller, who will become the definitive artist for this series. Rambunny quits the group, Manipulator destroys the universe and re-creates it, as Prometheus tries to come to grips with himself and his new role in life as a superpowered amoeba. Max Ink's artwork is just superb and fits the whole concept perfectly.

● **ISSUE #11** is the special "Inventory Issue" with contributions from Troy Hickman, Sam Gafford, Scott Shriver, Tony Lorenz, John Hurley, Lynn Allen, and many others as Small Press fandom pays tribute to the All-Spongy Squadron!

● **ISSUE #13** finds Nik Dirga doing it all again as a new storyline begins to unfold. It's been several months since Master Macabre was destroyed and Rambunny quit the group. Dawn and Kyoko (Ninja Ants girlfriend) join the group, and since Hank Jensen, aka The Manipulator, went to the stars. Boy Cockroach and Spunky have been jailed for jumping the chief of police. Ninja Ant, Kyoko, Spiff, and Dawn head out to a fancy restaurant where the entertainment turns out to be Herr Heinous! A battle follows, and Herr Heinous drops thirty stories only to vanish and reappear... somewhere else! The plot thickens.

● **ISSUE #14**, a 48 page digest, was written and drawn by Max Ink! A masterpiece! This issue tackles the issue of domestic violence with an

incredible depth of emotion. Max can write as well as he draws. Insightful and heartfelt, introspective, intelligent, one of the best comics I've ever read. This is exactly what so many of today's comics fail to do - address the REAL villains that have such an adverse effect on the quality of our lives.

● **ISSUE #15** introduces a new female villain called **MIND MASTER** in a story by Nik, art by Nik and Max, inks by Max and Joe Meyer. Mind Master tries to manipulate Pro's mind but gets more than she bargained for. She is also a pawn in a larger scheme, and it seems that perhaps Master Macabre is gearing up for a return.

● **ISSUE #16**, story by Nik and Max on everything else, is a terrific time-travel story in which our heroes get transported back to the age of dinosaurs and stranded there by a mysterious "someone" tampering with the machinery. Prometheus and Dawn fall in love in what is one of the most tender moments in comics history, and eventually they're all saved by the future descendants of the dinosaurs. A very clever concept with a unique twist ending, brought vividly to life by Max Ink's amazing pencils.

● **ISSUE #17** is dedicated to the late Eric Hampton in a story by Nik and Max again on all the other chores. A Christmas outing turns into a return engagement with King Krong and The Gorilla Gang. Rambunny returns in style! Packed with Christmas spirit and deeper meaning, our heroes perform various small good deeds and in the end Rambunny hits the road once again aboard his trusty motorcycle.

● **ISSUE #18** introduces **THE PERIOD**, a great new character worthy of Steve Ditko and the return of the Asbestos Mushroom! The All-Spongy Squadron is tricked into selling action figures of themselves to raise money and finance their adventures, but the figures are full of heroin. It's a frameup of course, and **THE PERIOD** is on the case. Lots of new plot threads introduced this issue and things are really picking up steam.

● **ISSUE #19** - Dawn and Pro fall deeper in love as **The Period** breaks half the group out of jail. They battle the Asbestos Mushroom in the Spongopolis Museum of Natural History, reunite with Prometheus and Dawn and in the end, in a very unexpected twist, Prometheus suddenly transforms into a human and vanishes while Dawn stands helpless, horrified! Great issue!

● **ISSUE #20** is an epic all-Rambunny issue! He wrestles with his conscience, the phantom of Manslaughter, King Krong, Werchuck, and a great new character called **GINZU**. Mind Master and Herr Heinous himself! The Rambunny character takes huge strides this issue in terms of his development and in the end Herr Heinous throws Rambunny off the top of a building.

● **ISSUE #21** - The **DARK AGES** storyline continues in this 2nd installment. The All-Spongy Squadron throw a huge blow-out party at the Amoebacave, invited everyone they've ever known to cheer up Dawn who is depressed over the loss of Prometheus, who changed back into Promethean a few issues back. Dawn leaves the party early, needing some space to think, and runs smack into Herr Heinous. Meanwhile Promethean wakes up in a wooded area by a stream and find he is the guest of Master Macabre himself! Max Ink's artwork in this issue is breathtaking.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12....



(AMOEBA ADVENTURES, Continued from page 5...)

● ISSUE #22 focuses in on Prometheus' life and identity and great cosmic secrets are revealed at last. I'm not going to reveal what happens in this issue. I don't want to spoil it for you. There is, to say the least, far, far more to Prometheus than you ever suspected. This is turning into a cosmic drama of epic proportions! One of the best issues yet!

● ISSUE #23 features part 4 of THE DARK AGES storyline. Rambunny walks out of a hospital to settle a few scores, while the Spongy Squadron, hung over from the night before, find that Dawn has been hospitalized. It seems THE DARK ONE who beat Dawn may actually be Hank Jensen, the Manipulator! Well, Ninja Ant and Spif track Hank Jensen to his old house to find things are not at all what they seem. While karate Kactus battles The Dark One and finds that things are NEVER what they seem! This storyline has more twists and turns than a rollercoaster ride! The characterization is without peer and Max Ink's artwork is mind-boggling. I suspect that by this time this whole concept has taken on a life on its own and Nik and Max are just along for the ride!

● ISSUE #24 - Dawn is in the hospital, Rambunny is missing, and the rest of the Squadron find themselves at the funeral of Isuzu Shiro, killed by the Dark One last issue, who is responsible for the presumed death of Karate Kactus as well. Dawn and Hank Jensen are reunited at the hospital after a very long time. Dawn and Pro meet again and discuss their growing love for each other in what is certainly the most unique relationship in all of comics. Alex strolls into the Amoebacave to reveal his is, indeed, the Dark One. Rambunny reappears in the nick of time.

● ISSUE #25 reveals the complete story of Alex, and it is far more complex than I have the space to go into here. It is a saga that spans human history, and the various plot threads that have spanned this series from the beginning are reconnecting, a grand scheme is unfolding, and the writing is....whew! Like nothing else!

● ISSUE #26 and #27 conclude The Dark Ages storyline and wraps everything up rather neatly. I choose not to reveal what happens in these two issues, because, well, I think you should buy them. I think you should buy the whole darn series, have them bound, and give it to your grandchildren for Christmas somewhere down the road.

Small Press has never seen the like of this before and I think it will be a long time before we see it again. For nearly a decade, Nik Dirga churned out this classic Homegrown comic, for the sheer joy of storytelling, without, I am sure, making a dime in profits. There was just some deep-rooted need to get this saga out of his head and onto paper, and he did it. In doing so, I cannot undervalue the contribution of Max Ink. While Nik's own pencils on the earlier issues were always effective enough, Max took this concept to new heights, becoming the definitive Amoeba artist.

In conclusion, I must point out that this series does not stand alone. It ties into several other books available from Nik, and there were also various strips and cameo appearances in zines from other publishers scattered across the years. Tracking them all down is part of the fun of collecting comics and believe me, this is a series well worth tracking down.

Nik, Max, I have only this to say: Thanks for enriching my life. This has all been great fun and I won't soon forget your hard work and dedication. Nik, do what you gotta' do. When you find your way back to Small Press - and I think you will in due course - we'll all still be here looking forward to whatever your keen brain is going to hatch next.

You've earned my respect and I wish you all the luck in the world in whatever you choose to do.

Timothy R. Corrigan June 1998

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