

THE WIZARD OF ZO

AND OTHER COLLECTED WORK

Jhonny Wruskin

with a foreword by Jeffrey W. Jackbury

SnuffBox Press

An imprint of The Afternoon

First published 1996
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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to Dostoevsky (*who taught me to dance like no one is watching*),

Nietzsche (*who taught me to love like I've never been hurt*),

the scholars of the SAE Conference (*who taught me to speak like no one is listening*),

and Aeschylus (*who taught me to live like it's heaven on earth*).

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PREFACE

It is an honor for SnuffBox Press to publish a 2020 edition of this early work of Jhonny Wruskin. Previously self-published by Wruskin himself in 1996, this edition of *The Wizard of Zo* is intentionally being released to coincide with the twenty-fourth anniversary of this griping and powerful work.

Jhonny Wruskin is the pseudonym for an early twenty-first century humanities professor at a humble Michigan college where they know not of his significant achievements. Wruskin prefers the anonymity of a penname and the employ of a non-prestigious school where his brilliant talents go wasted on “teaching” because, in his words, “I would easily succumb to the temptation and allure of celebrity and cease to create my important art for the greater benefit of society”. We all are grateful for Wruskin’s selfless commitment to his writing and art to the betterment of us all.

When word leaked that SnuffBox Press was publishing a 2020 edition of *The Wizard of Zo*, we had so many scholars vying to write the foreword to this book that we had to literally beat them off with a stick. (Note the use of the word ‘*literally*’. We actually did beat scholars with a stick, but most of them were adjunct professors and didn’t mind). Ultimately, Wruskin settled for Jeffrey W. Jackbury scholar, past-collaborator, and one-time friend. Jackbury let bygones be bygones and drafted a foreword fitting enough to stand alongside *The Wizard of Zo*.

To commemorate the twenty-fourth anniversary of *The Wizard of Zo*, this book also includes previously unpublished material from Wruskin. *A Labor Day Carol, previously unpublished*, is an unfinished work on the difficulties of celebrating a holiday. The book concludes with an afterword from Wruskin himself reflecting on the significance of *The Wizard of Zo* more than two decades after he first set pen to page.

At SnuffBox Press, our hope and prayer is that not only will this edition of *The Wizard of Zo* bring the work of Wruskin to a new generation of readers, but also provide a waypoint for scholars and future researchers to fixate upon as they study and write about Wruskin’s impact for decades to come.

Daniel Dunbar, Publisher
SnuffBox Press

FOREWORD

Many forewords are by their very nature hyperbolic and gratuitously flattering. This foreword is by no means an exception to that rule; yet the reader should be advised that the contents of this esteemed book are at the same time equally groundbreaking as it is utilitarian—leading toward a kind of universal peace that the world has not heretofore observed.

You might be aware of Jhonny Wruskin's previous works, *Swell People*, not to mention his semi-autobiographical novel, *A Canticle for Rinckowitz: An Electrical Engingeer's Tale*. His filmography too speaks for itself with laudable pictures including, but not limited to, *The Dynasty of Duck: Microbial Organisms Residing in the Beard of Hunters*, and of course, *Krebill's Fables: Stories of Truth*. While lines on one's vitae speak for themselves, my task at hand is to take a deep dive into the inglorious and tortured life of this famed author of *The Wizard of Zo*. I take writing this foreword about his character to be both a privilege and an obligation to fate—as my ice fishing buddy once said, "Once one said 'God' when one looked upon distant seas; but now I have taught you to say: overman." Never a truer word, Kevin, never a truer word.

And such it is with *The Wizard of Zo*. With perennial lines like, "Golly this is taking a long time," and "Say! You have no legs! Wump! Wump! Wump! Wump! Wump! Wump! Wump! Wump! Wump!" Literary critics have a difficult time putting into words the kind of existential angst this creative language engenders. What is most remarkable about this almost-Newbery Award winning book* is that Wruskin penned this opus as a young child showing the world that he was the Beethoven-equivalent for graphic novels, deafness and pimple-popping notwithstanding.

My thorough analysis into Wruskin's beautiful mind has taken me to places that readers might find wholly disturbing, yet I on the other hand have found his esoteric quirks to be a refreshing respite from the dull academic speak of the late Modern Era. Are Wruskin's Tourette-like stammering's about the murder of a colleague—a "Brent-cleansing" as he so often utters under his breath—threatening to the general public? No, of course not. Is it threatening to his colleague 'Brent'? Most definitely. But this is the unparalleled ingenious creativity that we have come to expect from a savant like Wruskin. No harm will likely come to said 'Brent'; and if it does, the world welcomes such a small, meaningless sacrifice at the hands of a creative genius like Wruskin.

In this book we find a heroin who, despite all odds, is able to anachronistically transcend both time and space and find, in the end, that she is only transcending herself. How true, Wruskin, how true. I know I can speak for the readership when I mention that I cannot imagine how my life would be different if, as I child, I did not read the eloquent words from Dorthy (sic), "Bye everyone! It was nice walking with you, but not real nice. So long!" And just like that, Dorthy wakes from her slumber with a mask covering her face. Wruskin's message to his audience are obvious: Figure out what masks you are wearing to society, and then destroy all persons, places, and things that get in the way of you keeping those masks right where they are, baby!

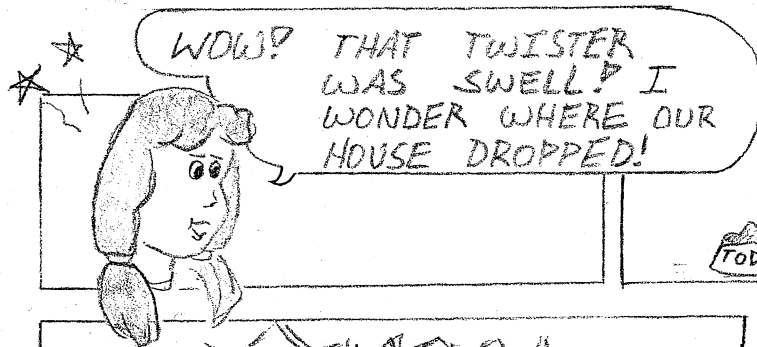
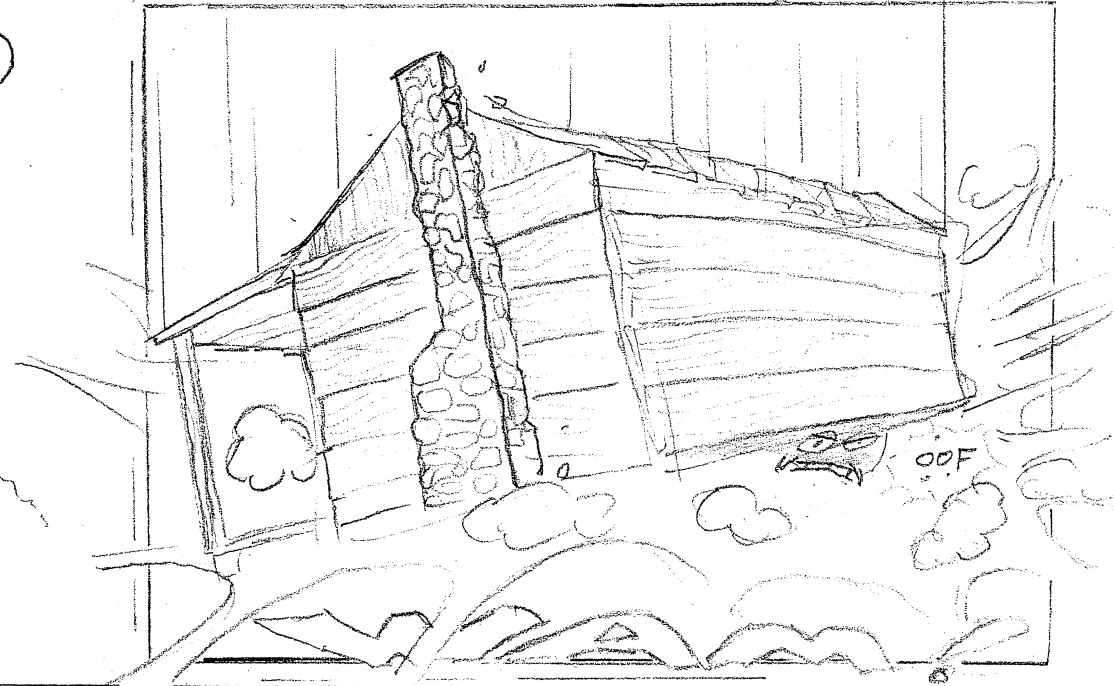
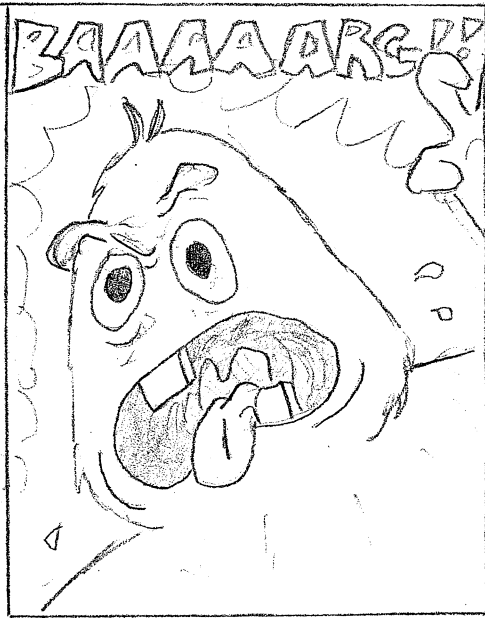
I sincerely hope the readers enjoy this book as much as I have. And—Lord hasten the day!—at some time in the near future, when the universe calls you back to the stardust from whence you came, remember that whether or not you have a face is not the issue (as some weird clown wizard can just draw one on with a permanent marker). The real issue is what are you going to do with the manically drawn face on your straw-man body. Take us home, Wruskin. Take us home.

Jeffrey W. Jackbury
September 2020

THE WIZARD OF ZO

The Wizard of Zo

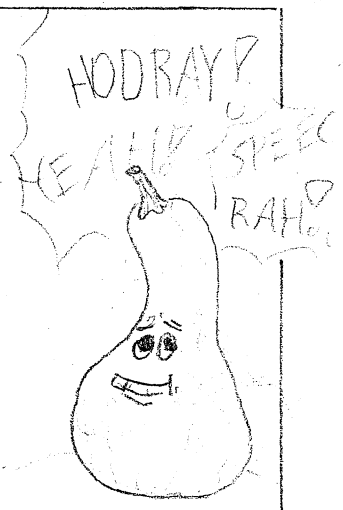
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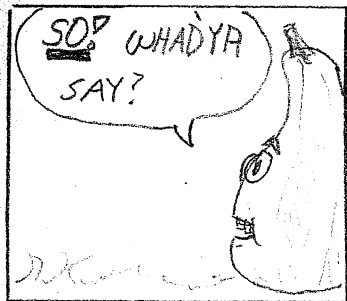


TODO, I HAVE A FEELING WERE NOT IN KANSAS...



CONGRATULATIONS! YOUR HOUSE LANDED ON THE SINISTER SNOWMONSTER OF THE SOUTH! AS MAYER, I GIVE TO YOU A CERTIFICATE FOR A FREE HAIR CUT AT NED'S HAIR CUTTERY! ALSO—YOU'VE WON YOURSELF A FREE LAND PLOT ON SHMEE LANE! ALL THIS IS A TOKEN OF APRICIATION FOR KILLING THAT MUNCHKIN-EATING MONSTER!

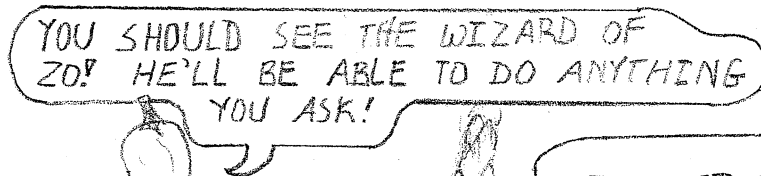




SO? WHADYA SAY?



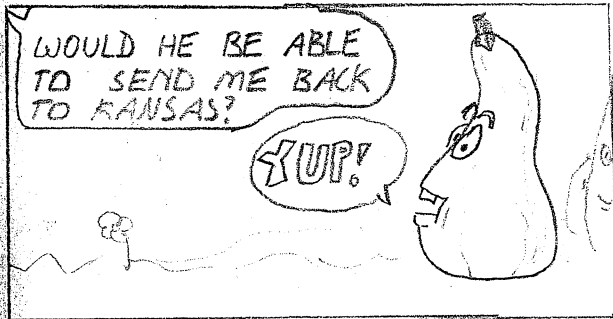
WELL MUNCHKIN-LAND IS JUST NIFTY, BUT I WANT TO BE HOME! THE STODGES COME ON TONIGHT AND I WANT TO WATCH THEM! HOME!



YOU SHOULD SEE THE WIZARD OF ZO! HE'LL BE ABLE TO DO ANYTHING YOU ASK!



TO GET THERE JUST STAND ON THE YELLOW CONVAERBELT



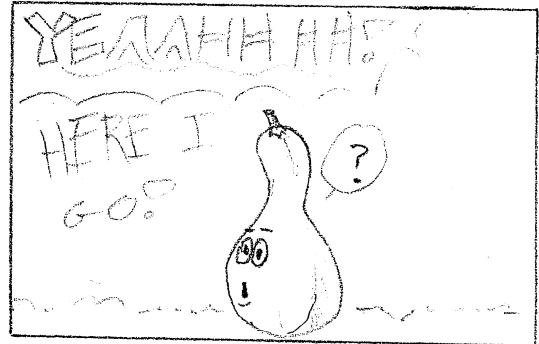
WOULD HE BE ABLE TO SEND ME BACK TO KANSAS?

YUP!



AND COULD HE GIVE ME A SUCKER?

YUP!

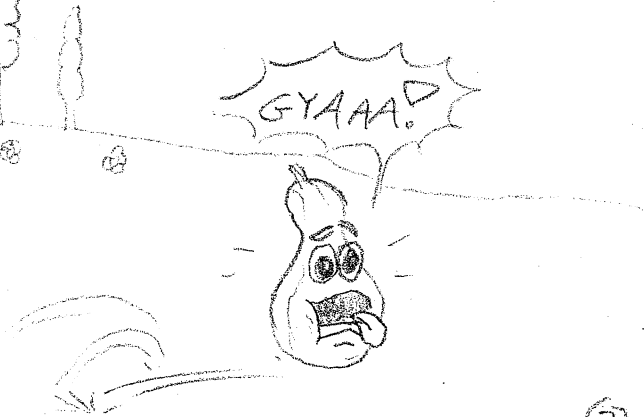


YEAHHHHH
HERE I GO?



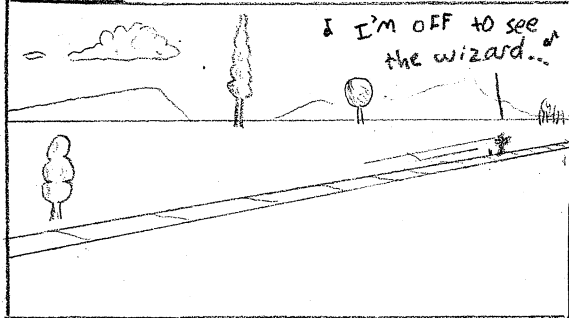
C'MON TODO! WE'RE GONA' SEE ZO!

AND SO DORTHY AND TODO (THE TOY TAIPER) SET OUT TO THE LAND OF ZO.

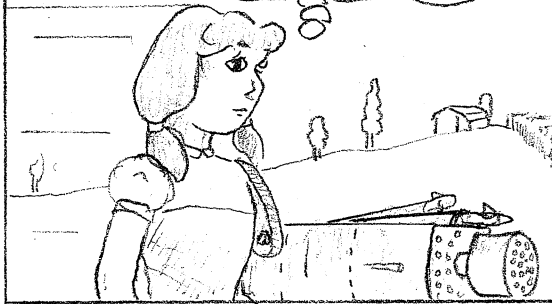


GYAAA!

THE YELLOW CONVAERBELT
SPEEDELY TAKES THEM AWAY.

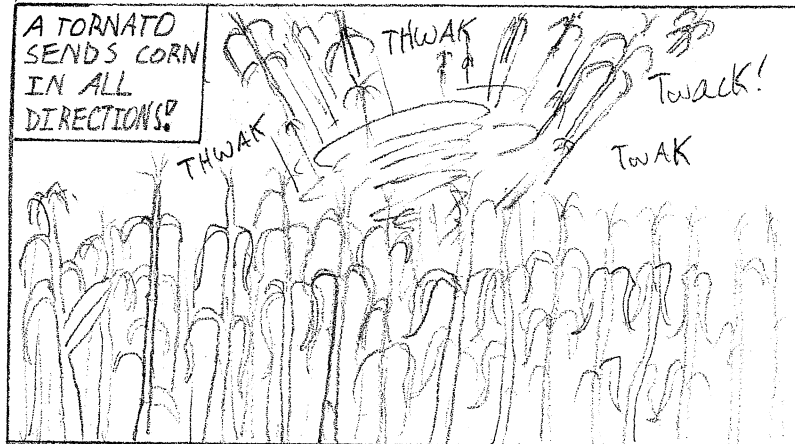


GOLLY, THIS IS TAKING
A LONG TIME.



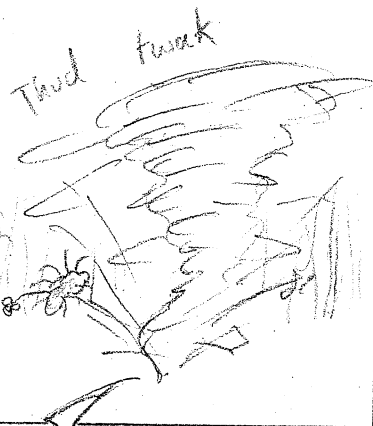
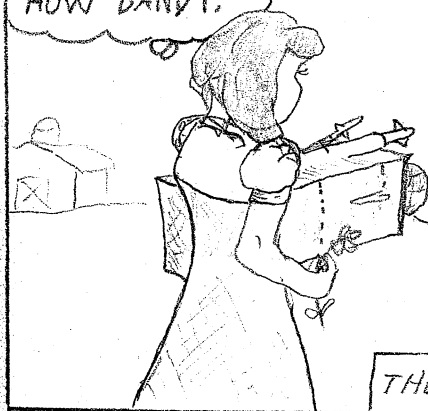
S
U
D
D
E
N
L
Y

A TORNATO SENDS CORN
IN ALL
DIRECTIONS!



DORTHY AND TODD
STEP OFF THE CONVAERBELT.

HOW DANDY!



THE TORNATO COMES TO A STOP...



... AND TURNS OUT TO BE
A STRAW-MAN.

A KIPTH!



SMASHING AN
ARM INTO
THE GROUND,
HE SENDS
CLODS OF DIRT
IN ALL DIRECTIONS.



SAY! I'M OFF TO SEE
THE WIZARD OF ZO! HE
CAN DO ANYTHING I ASK.
HE'S GONA' GIVE ME A
SUCKER!

I SORTA' KINDA'
SUPPOSE HE'D GIVE
YOU MEDICATION TO
MAKE YOU LESS
HYPER! AND A
FACE!!!

ARE YOU
THRILLED?

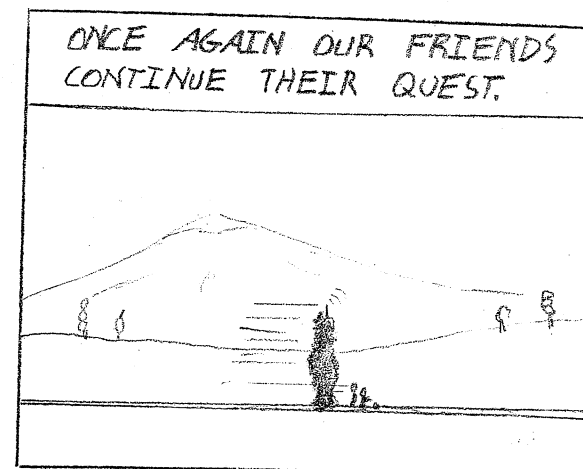
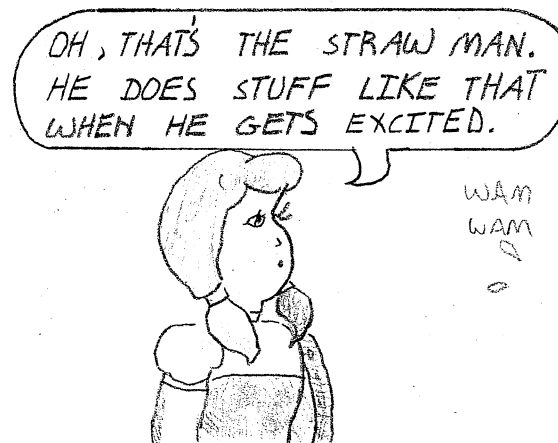
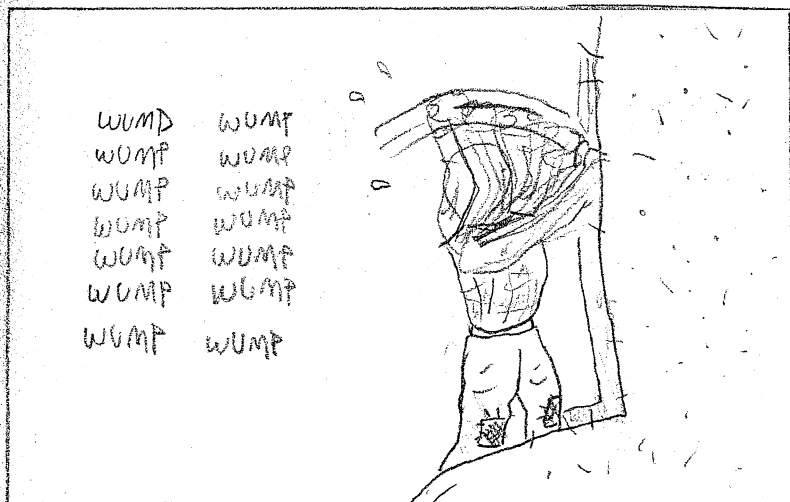
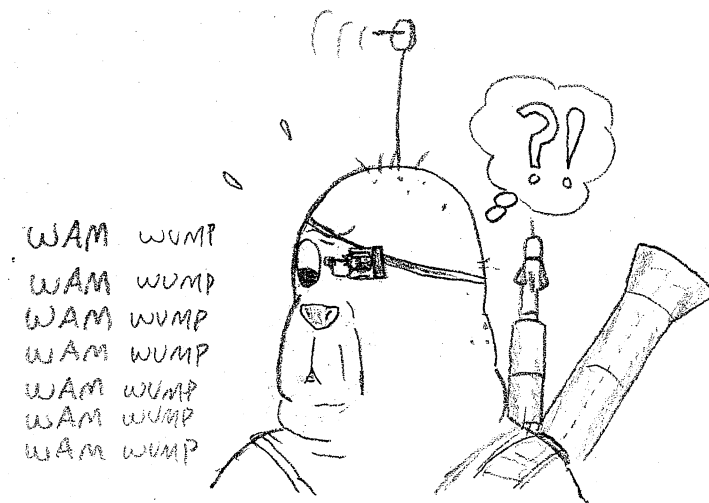
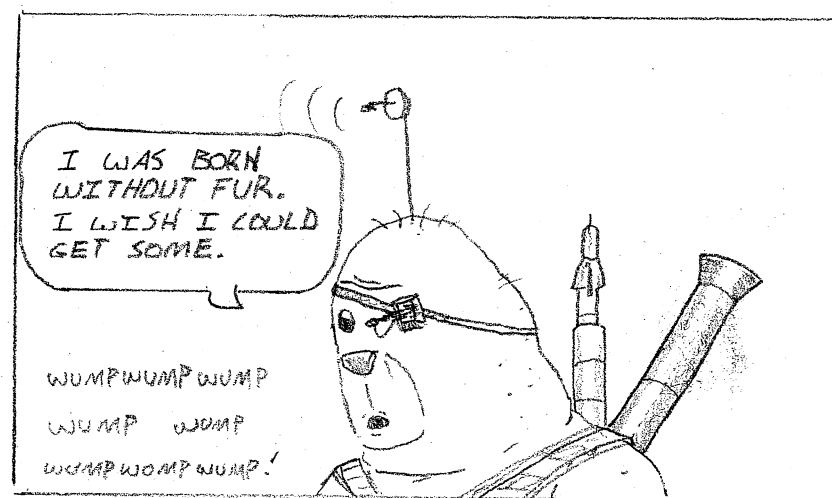
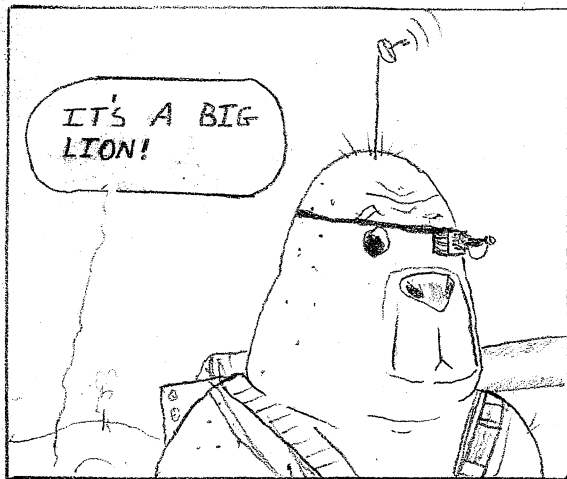
AND SO OUR
TWO FRIENDS
HEAD ON TO
THE LAND OF
ZO.

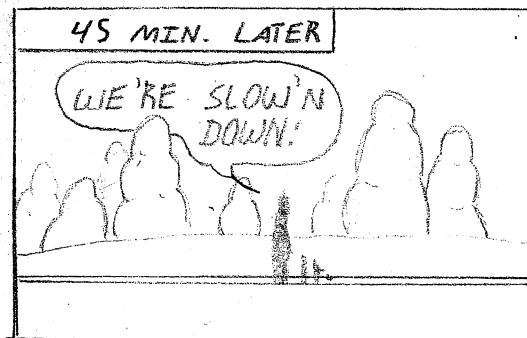
WE'RE OFF TO SEE
THE WIZARD

2 HRS. LATER...

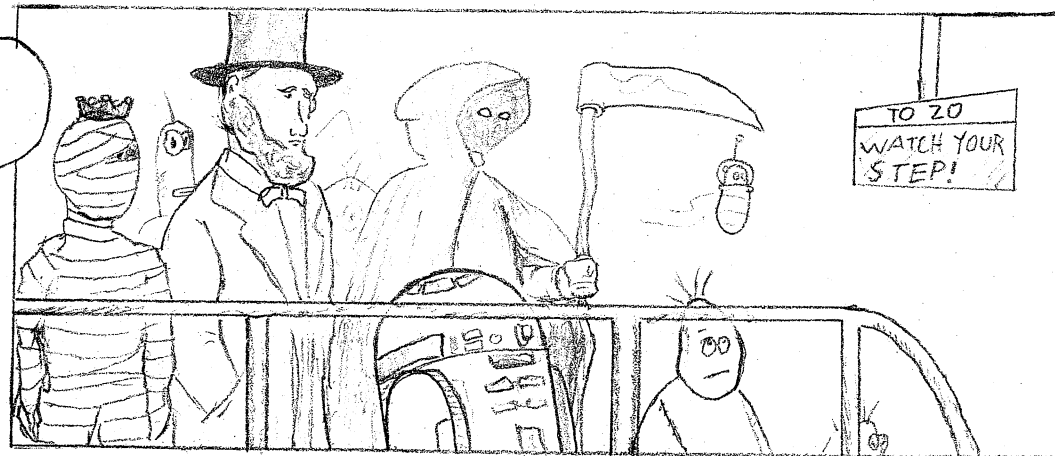
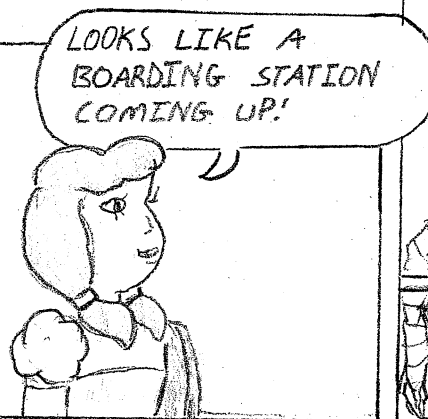
HEY, LOOK!

I WONDER
WHAT THAT THING
BEHIND THE HILL IS,





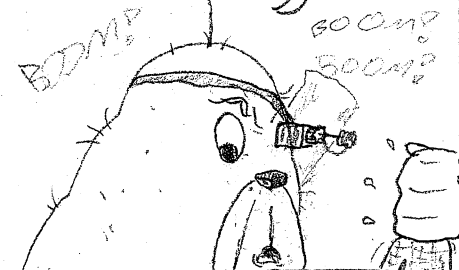
THE STRAW-MAN FREAKS.



CARRYING THE STRAW-MAN IN HIS HAND THE LION, ALONG WITH DORTHY, QUICKLY LEAVE.

LATER...

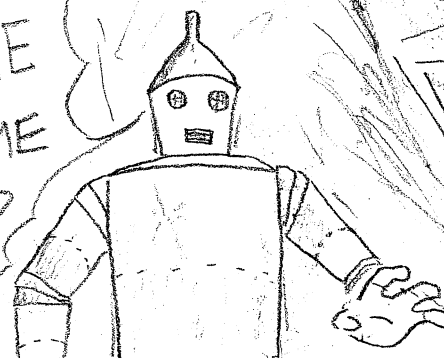
YOU'VE REALY DONE
IT THIS TIME!



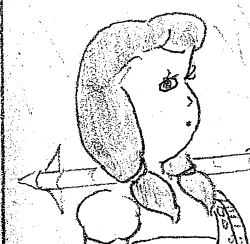
HELP!



THEY'RE
AFTER ME
AGAIN!



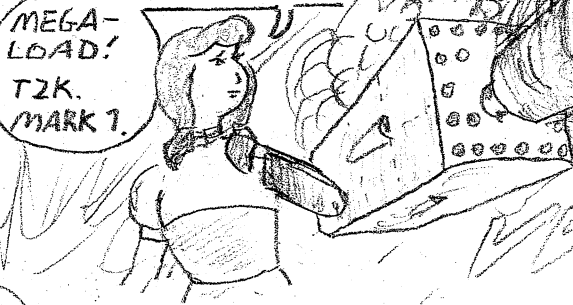
THOUSANDS OF X-WINGS!



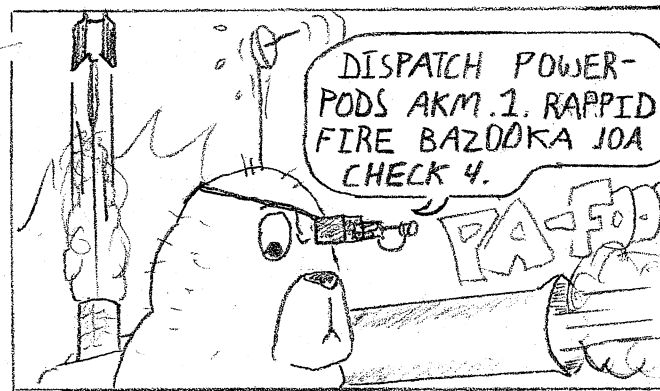
LET'S GET
'EM!

YES, LET'S! DISPATCH
HIGH POWER MA.107
WHITE PHOSPHORUS

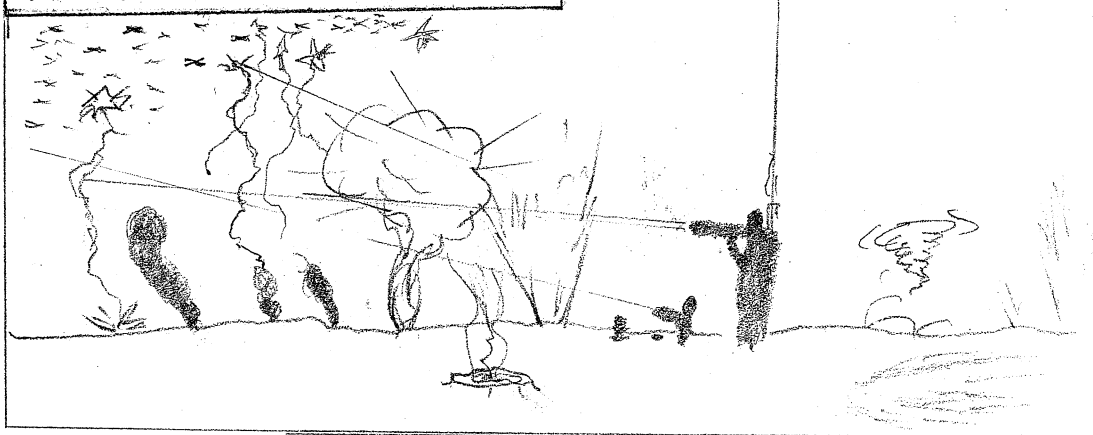
MEGA-
LOAD!
TZK.
MARK 1.

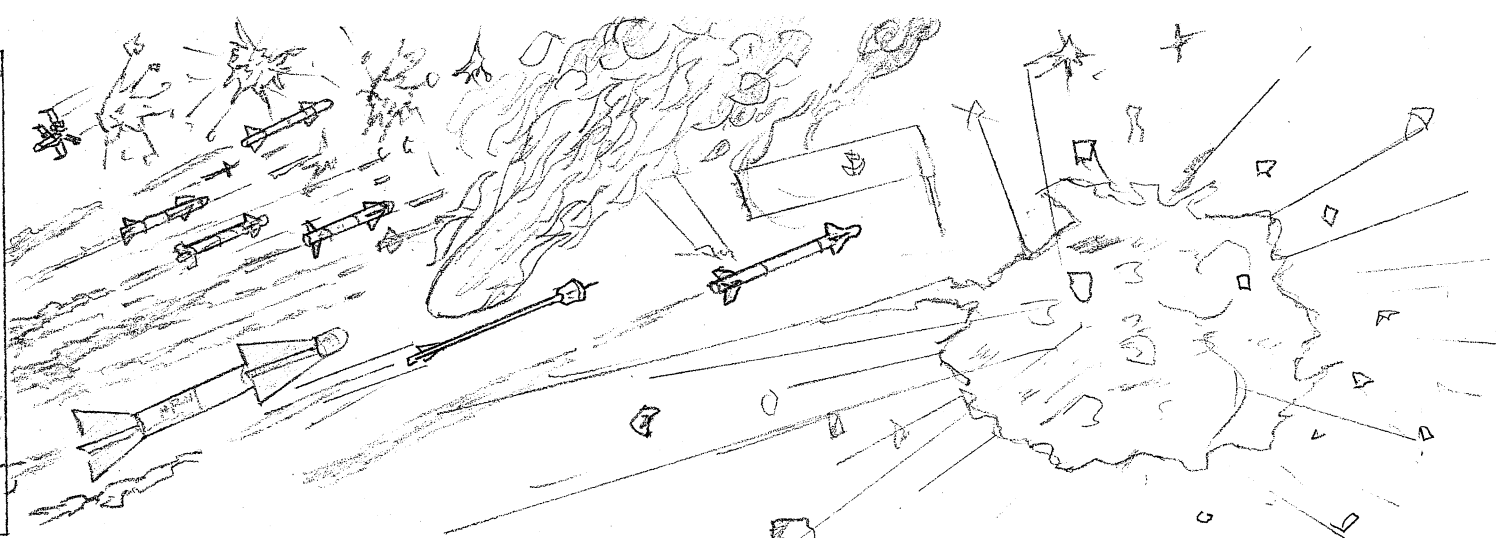
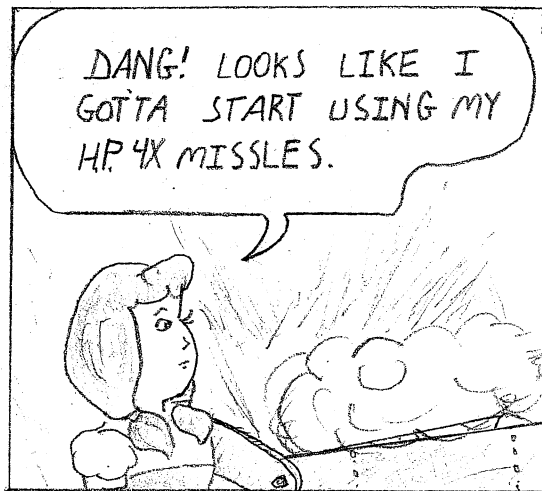


DISPATCH POWER-
PODS AKM.1. RAPPID
FIRE BAZOOKA JOA
CHECK 4.

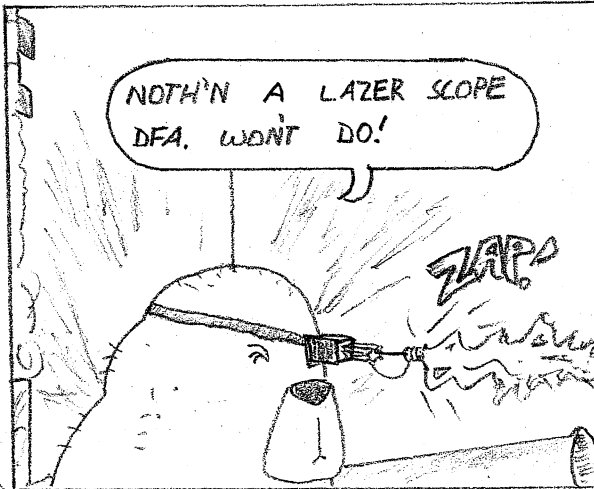
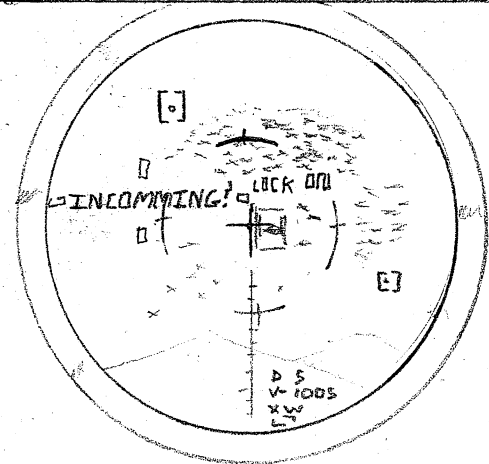


DORTHY AND THE LION UNLEASH
THEIR SEEMINGLY UNLIMITED
AMMO AT THE X-WINGS.

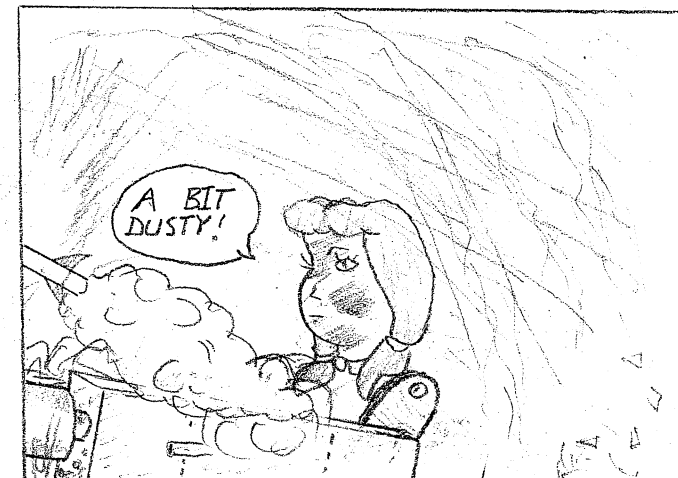
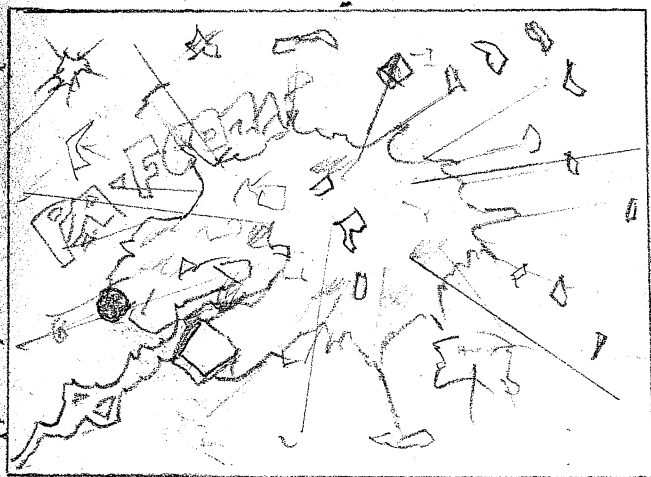
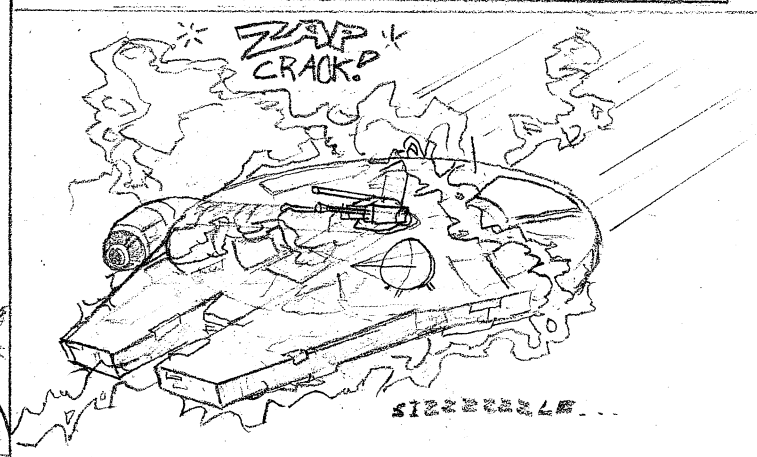


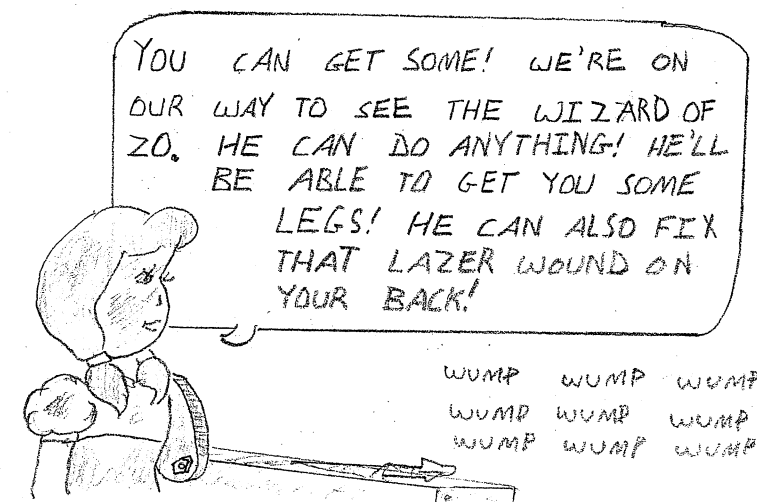
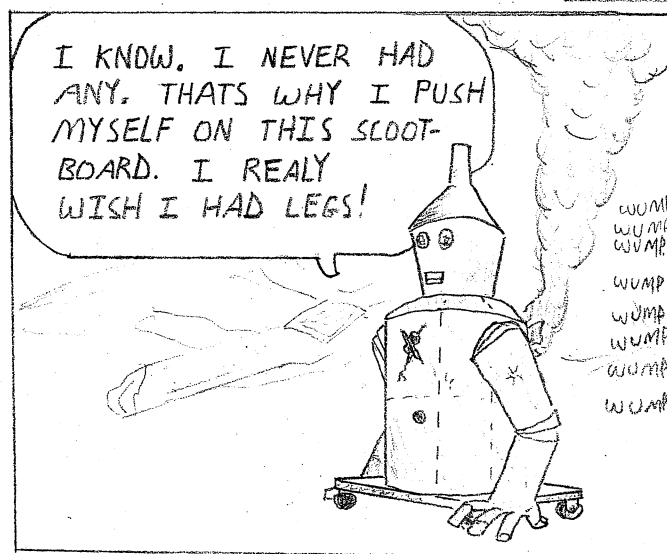
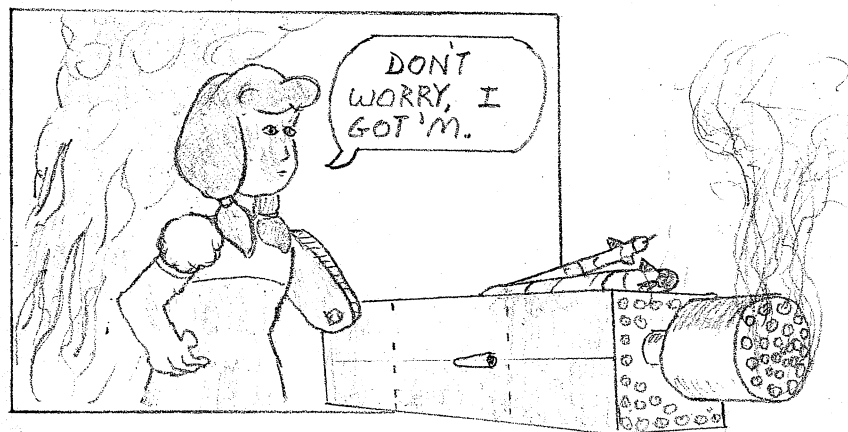
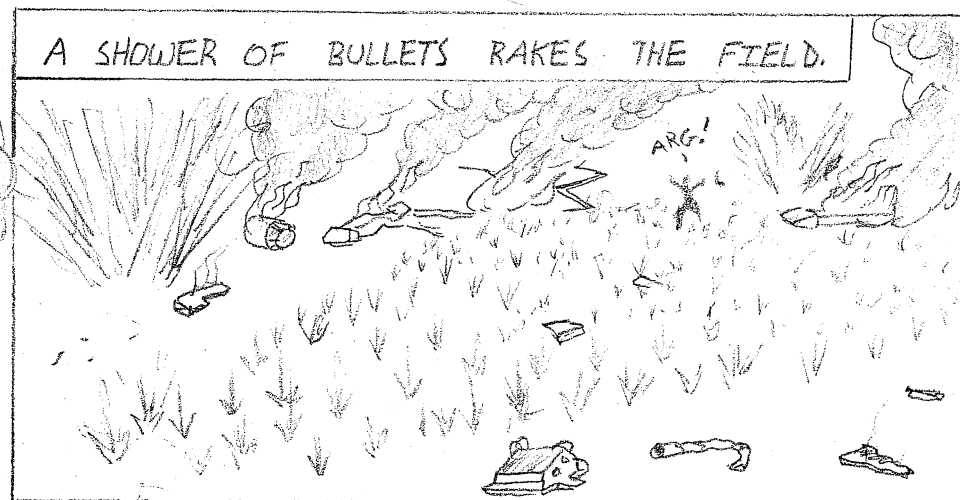
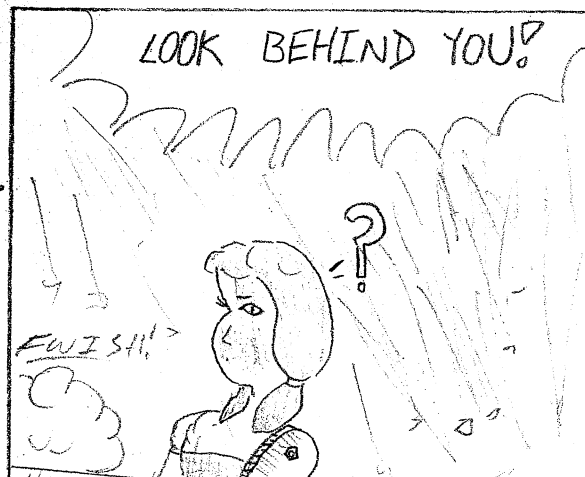


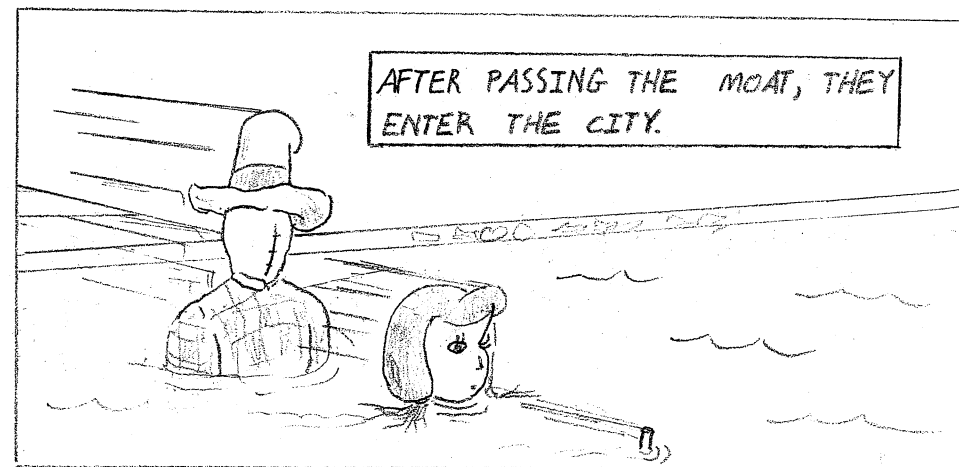
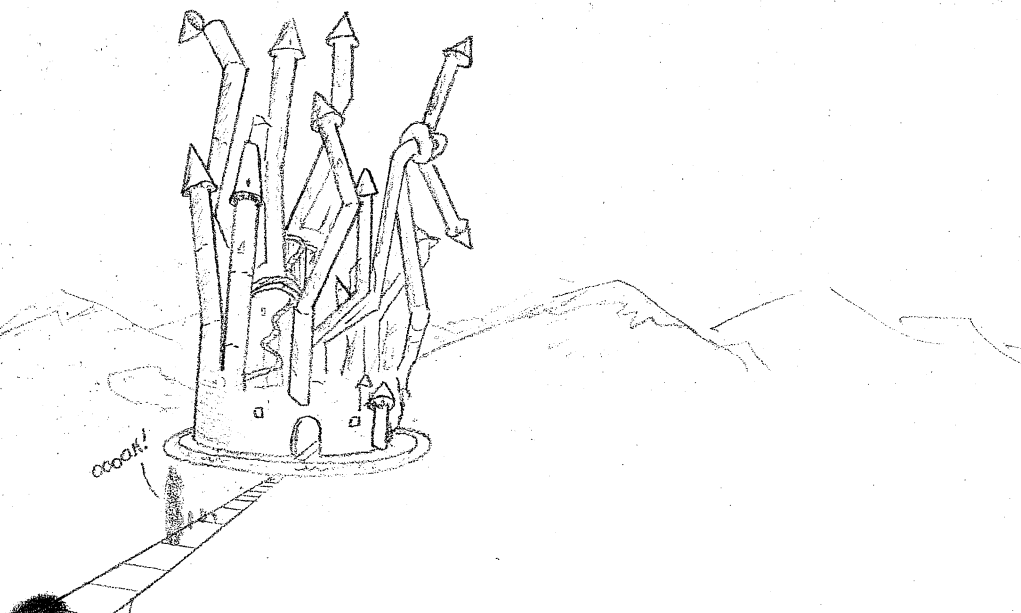
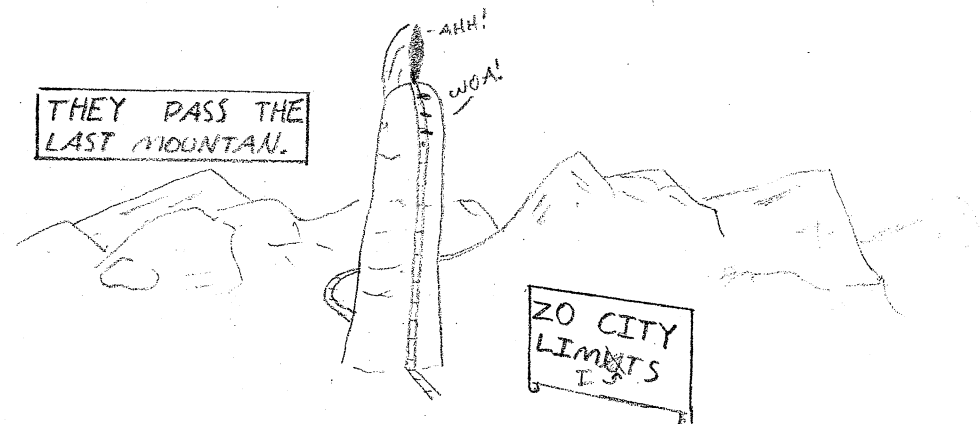
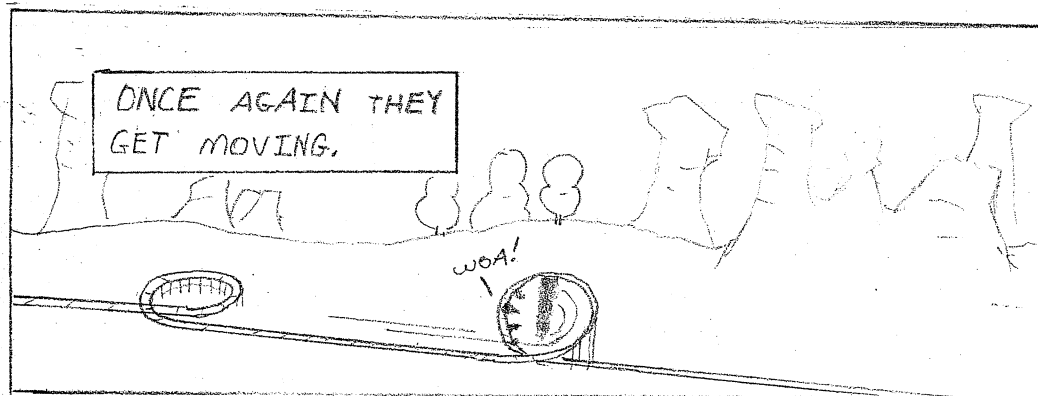
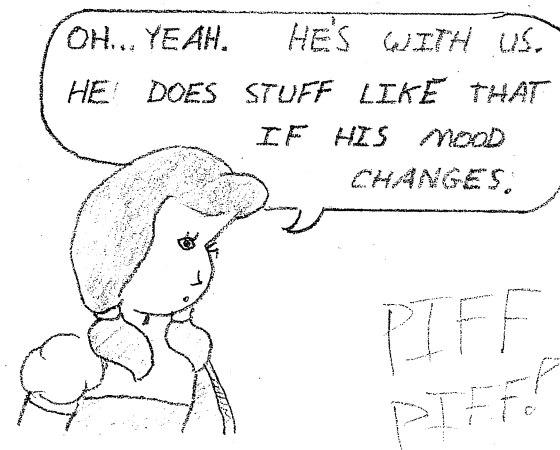
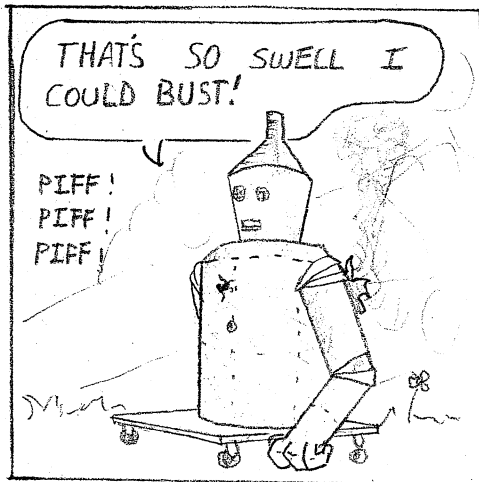
BUT THE LION SEES MORE COMING

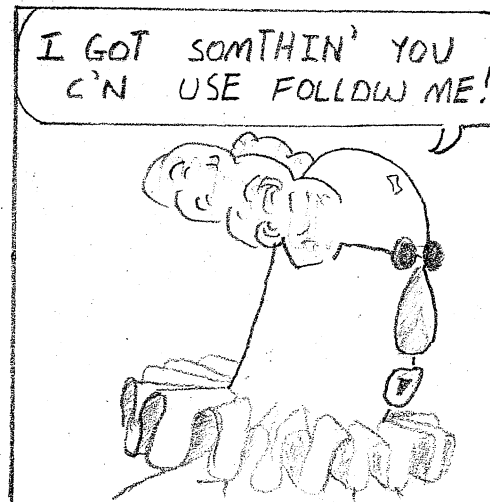
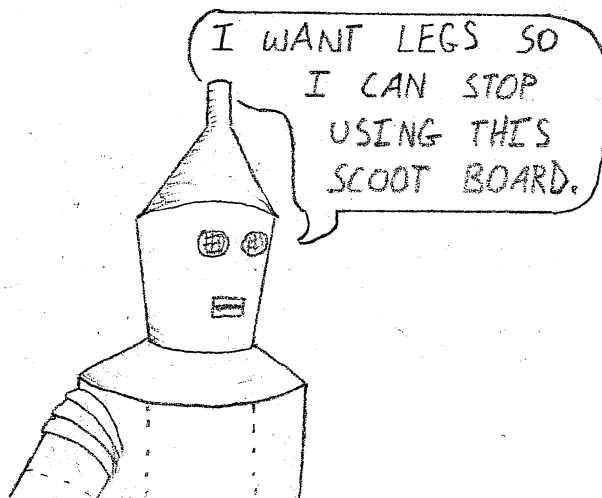
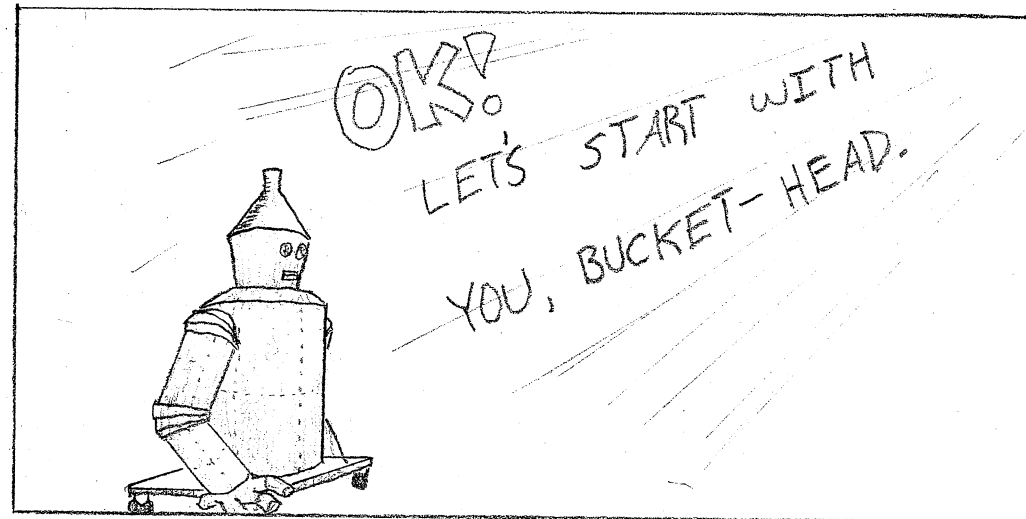
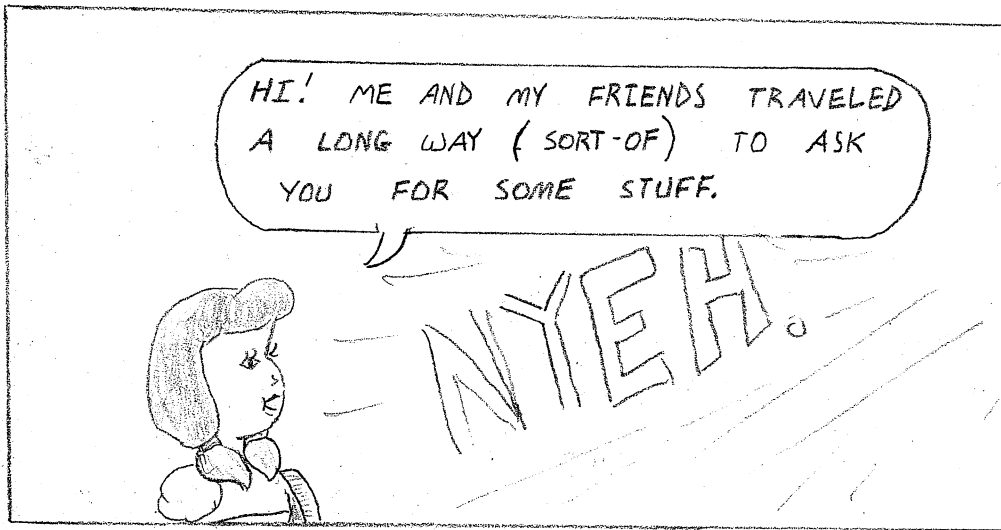
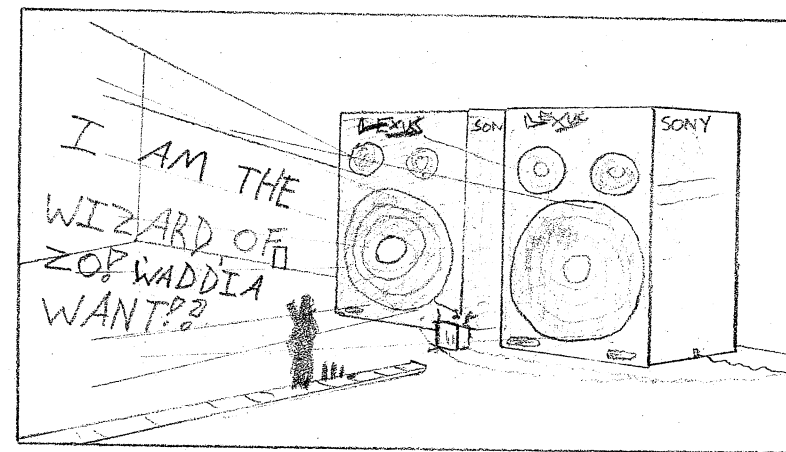
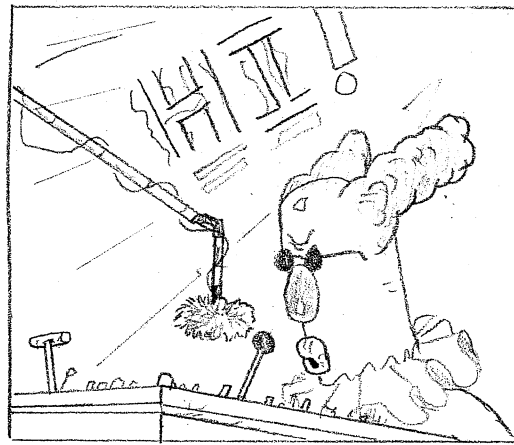
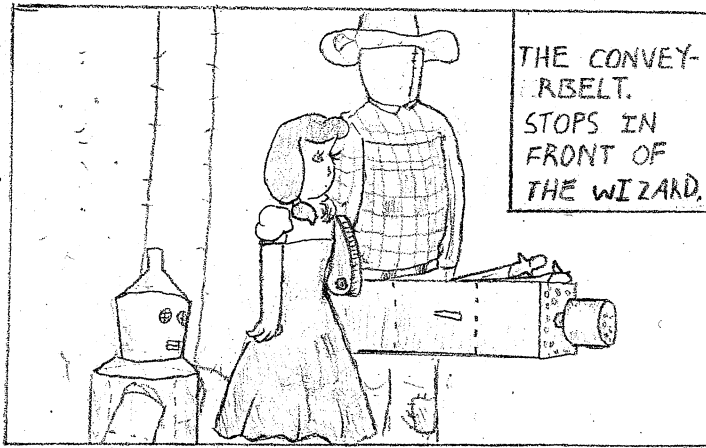


THE CLOUD OF X-WINGS VANISHES.

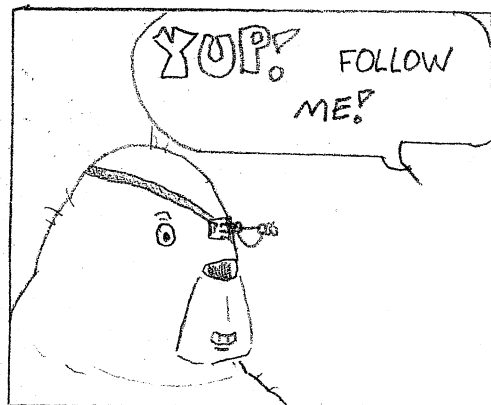
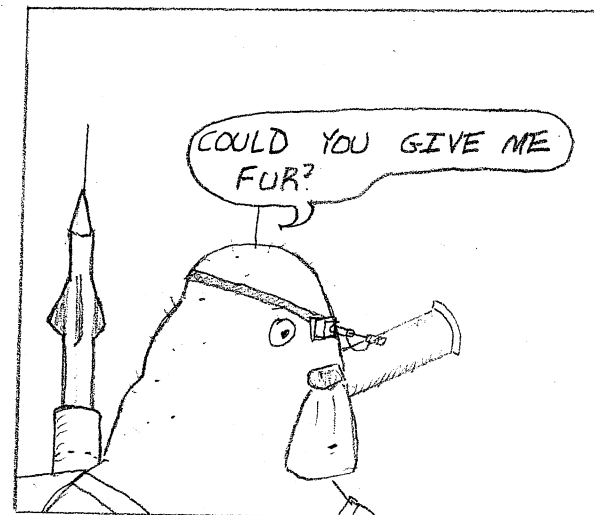
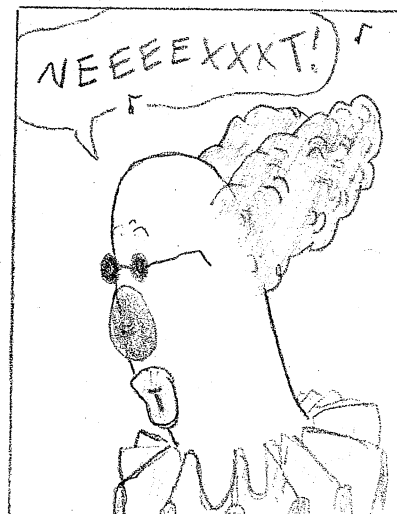
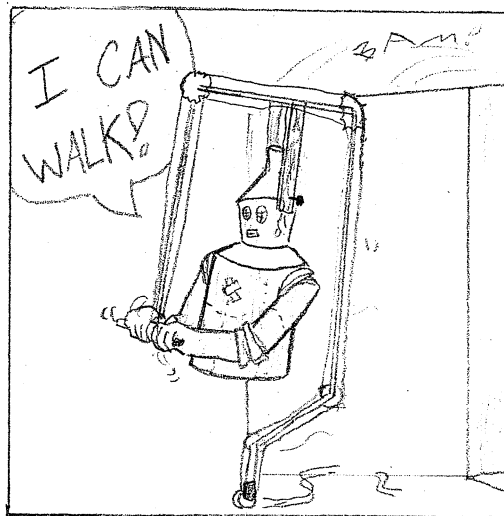
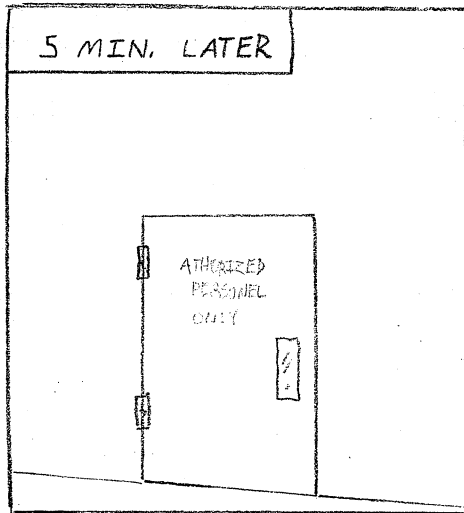




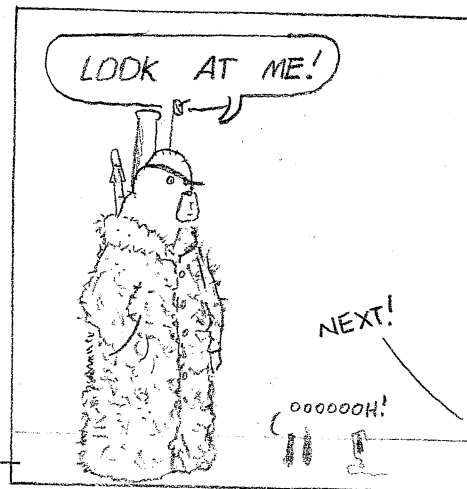


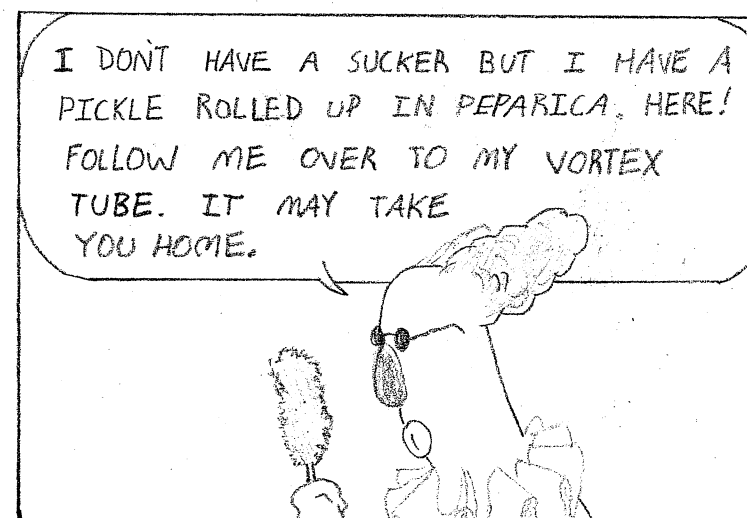
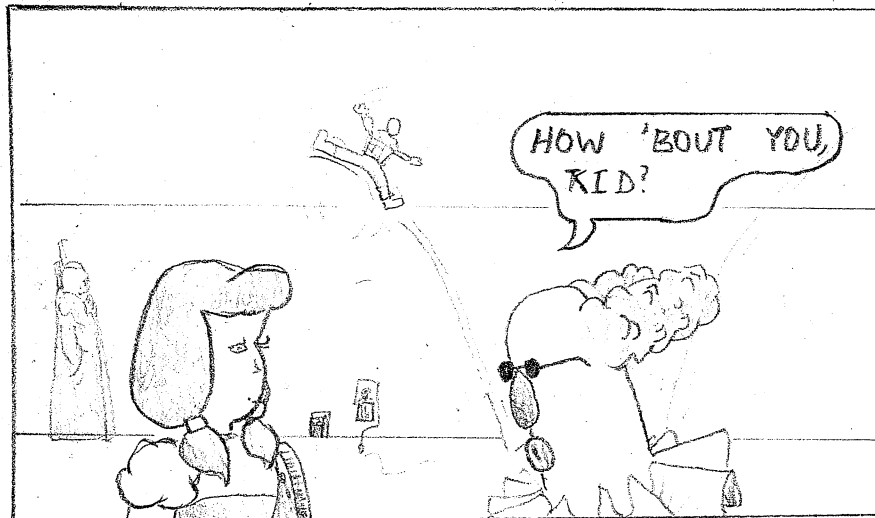
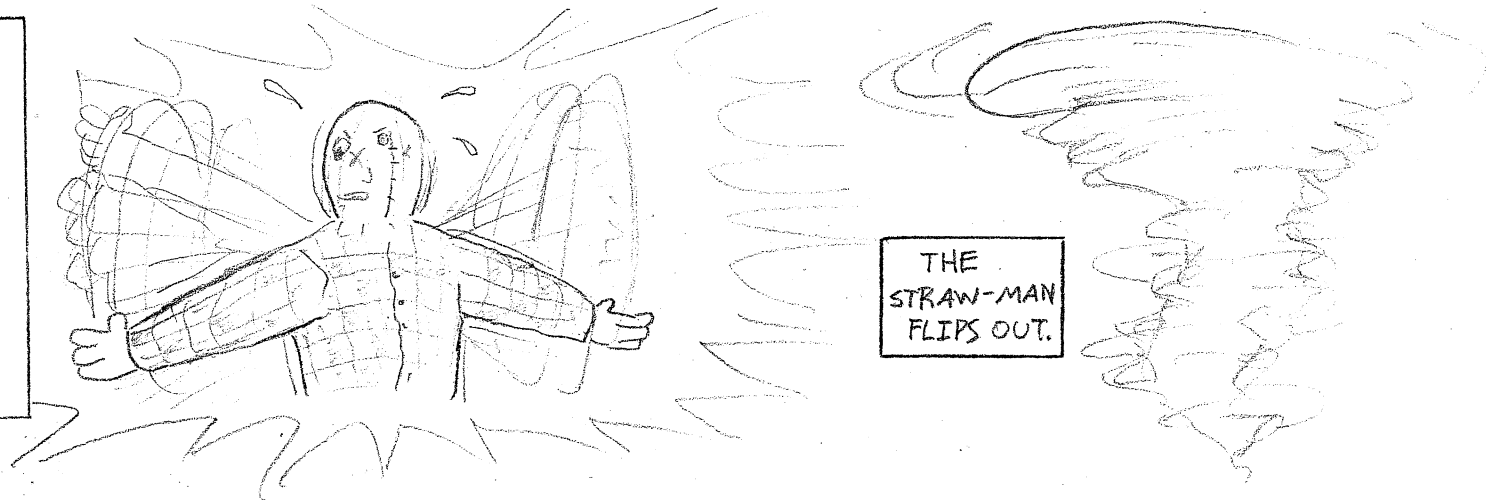
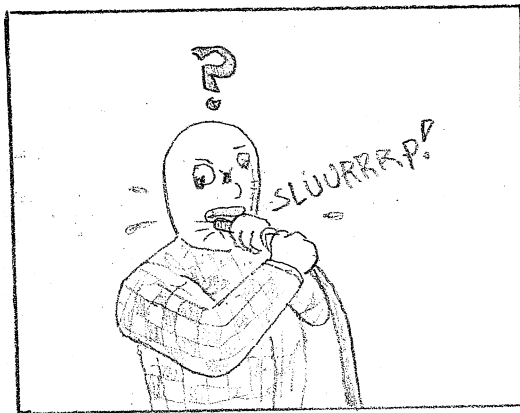
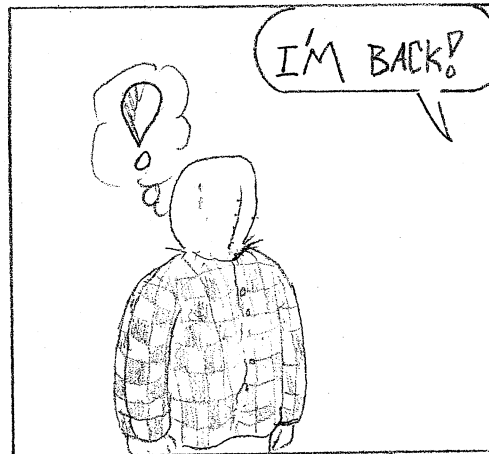


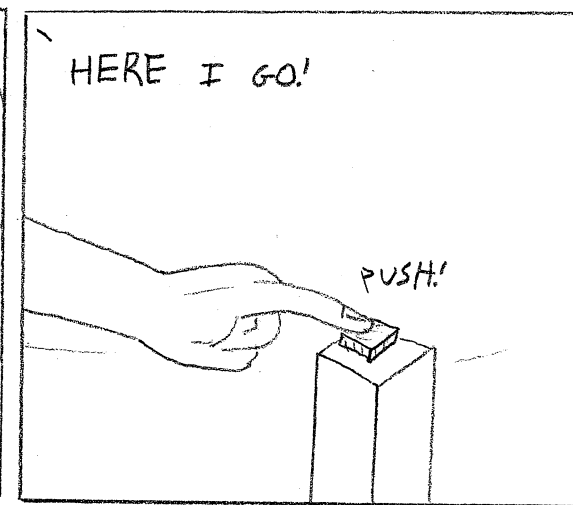
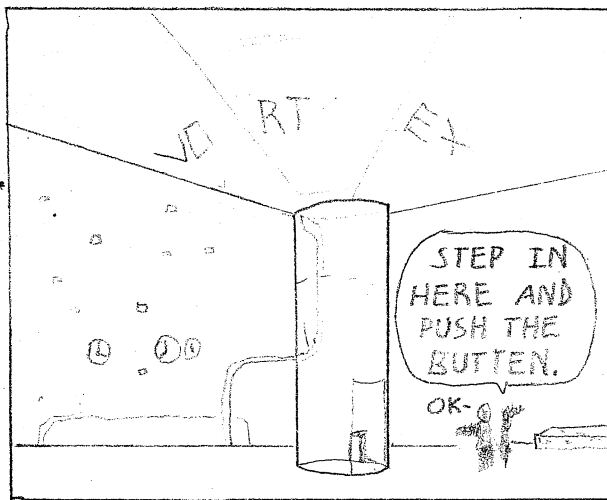
THE WIZARD LEADS THE TIN-MAN INTO A SMALL ROOM.



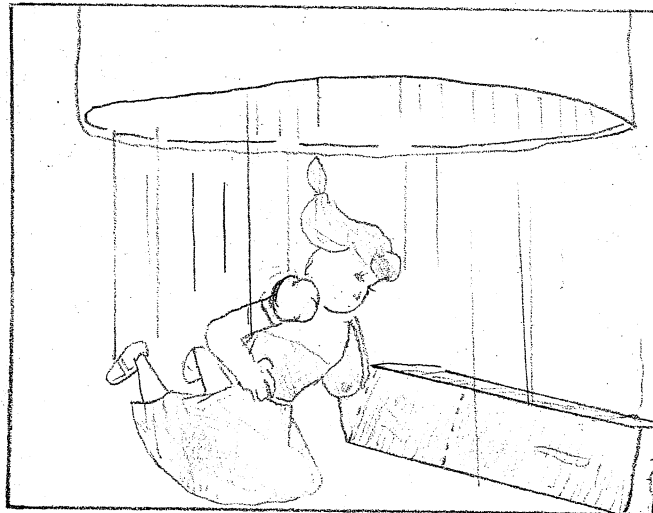
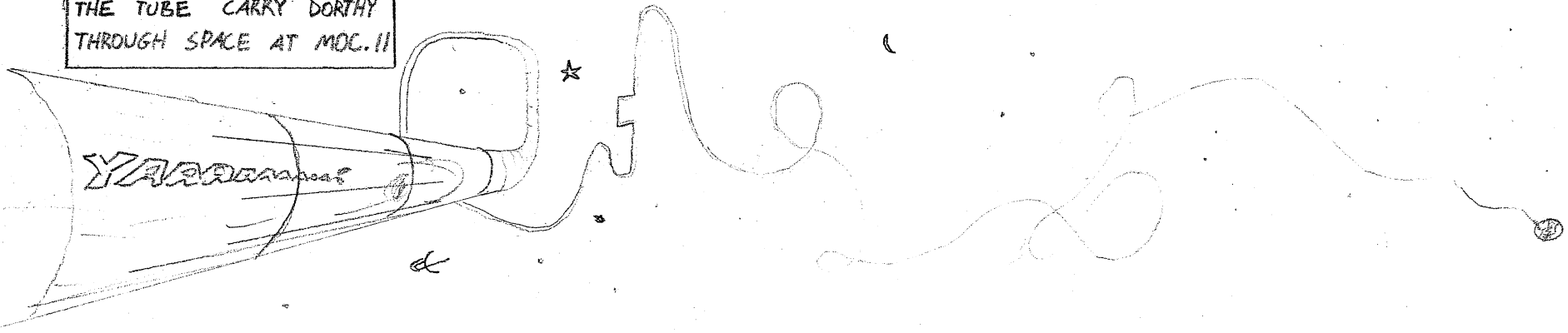
10 MINUTS
LATER.



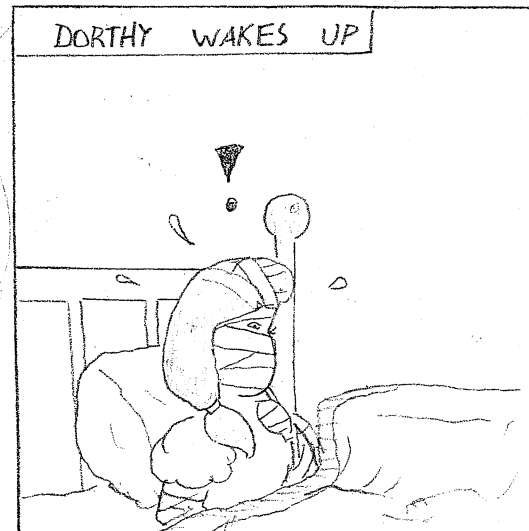


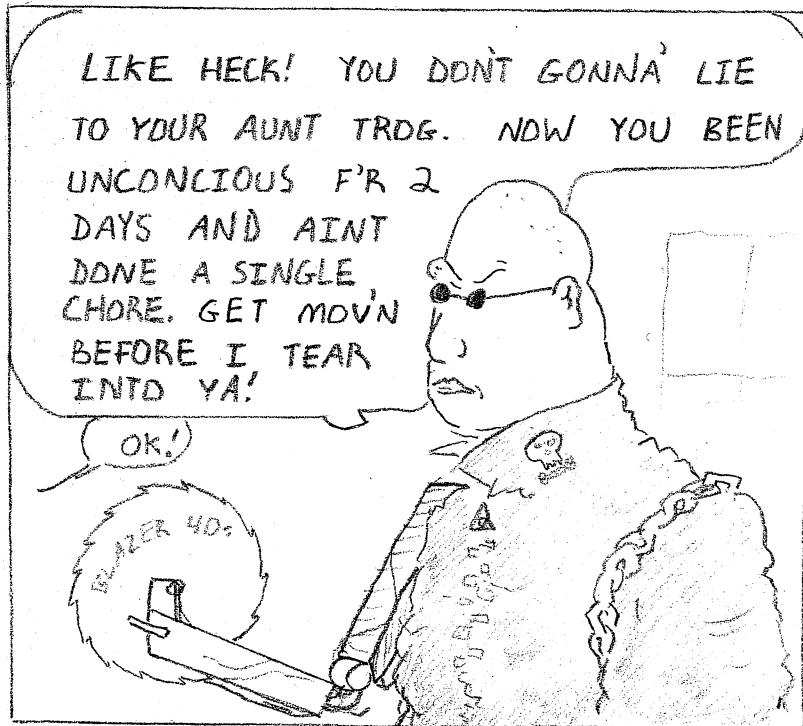


THE TUBE CARRY DORTHY
THROUGH SPACE AT MOC. II



PHEE





THE END

A LABOR DAY CAROL

IT WAS LABOR DAY EVE, AND THE ENTIRE CITY OF LONDON WAS FILLED WITH SLIGHTLY HAPPY PEOPLE.

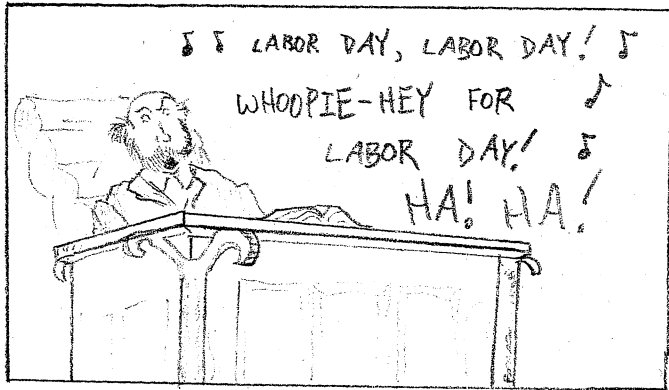


BUT NOT ALL WERE HAPPY. THERE WAS ALWAYS ONE WHO WAS....

EXTATIC.



♪ ♪ LABOR DAY, LABOR DAY! ♪
WHOOPIE-HEY FOR
LABOR DAY! ♪
HA! HA!

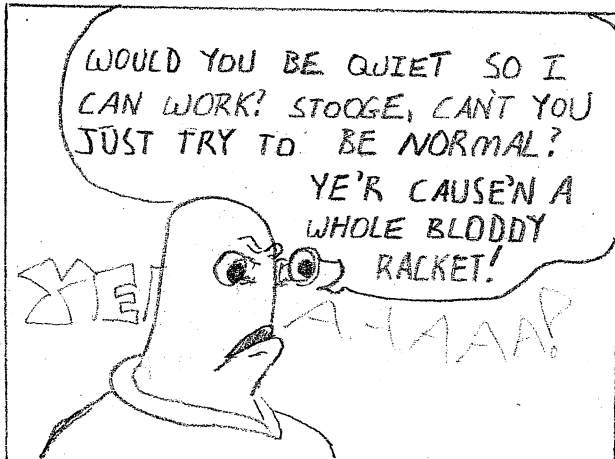


YES, THERE WAS ALWAYS EBENEZER STOOGE, THE HEAD OF A SUCCESSFUL 19TH CENTURY GAG STORE.

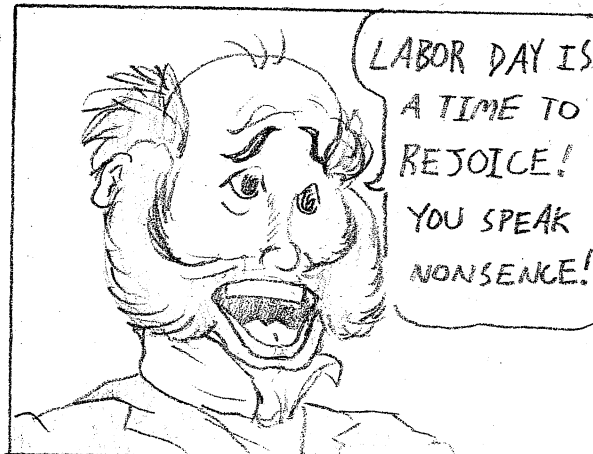
YEH! HAP HORAY!
WHADYA SAY,
BOB?



WOULD YOU BE QUIET SO I CAN WORK? STOOGE, CANT YOU JUST TRY TO BE NORMAL? YE'R CAUSE'N A WHOLE BLODDY RACKET!

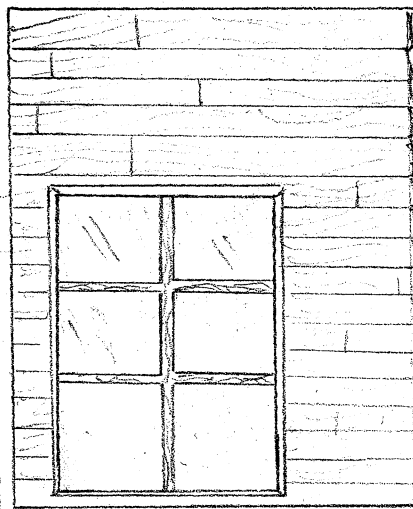
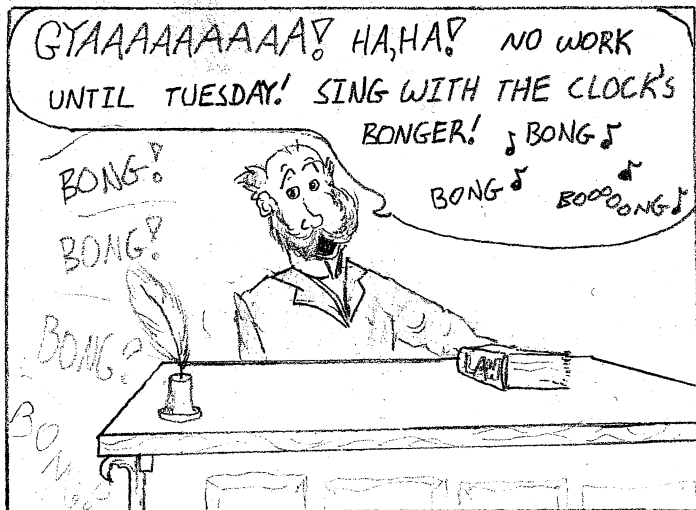


LABOR DAY IS A TIME TO REJOICE! YOU SPEAK NONSENCE!



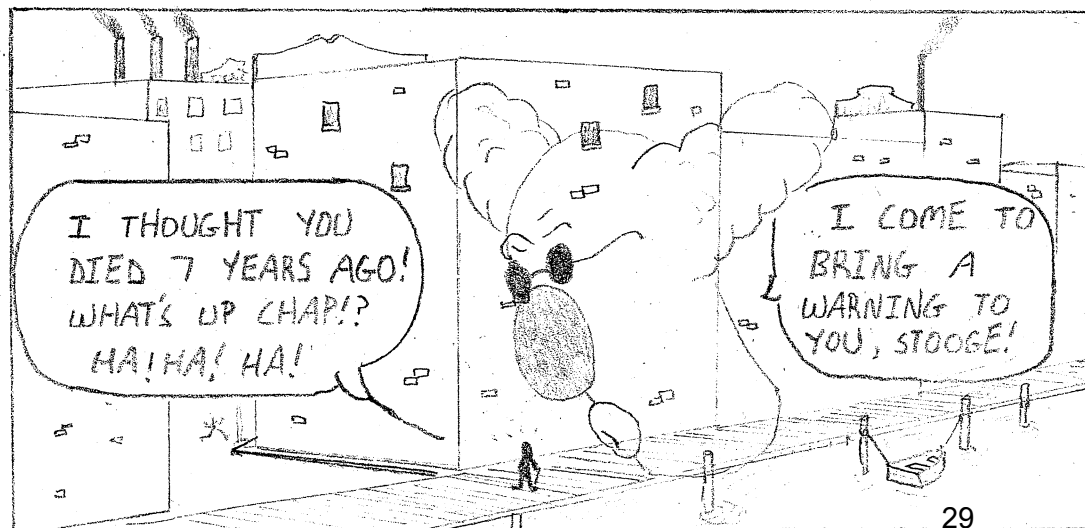
BONG!
BONG!

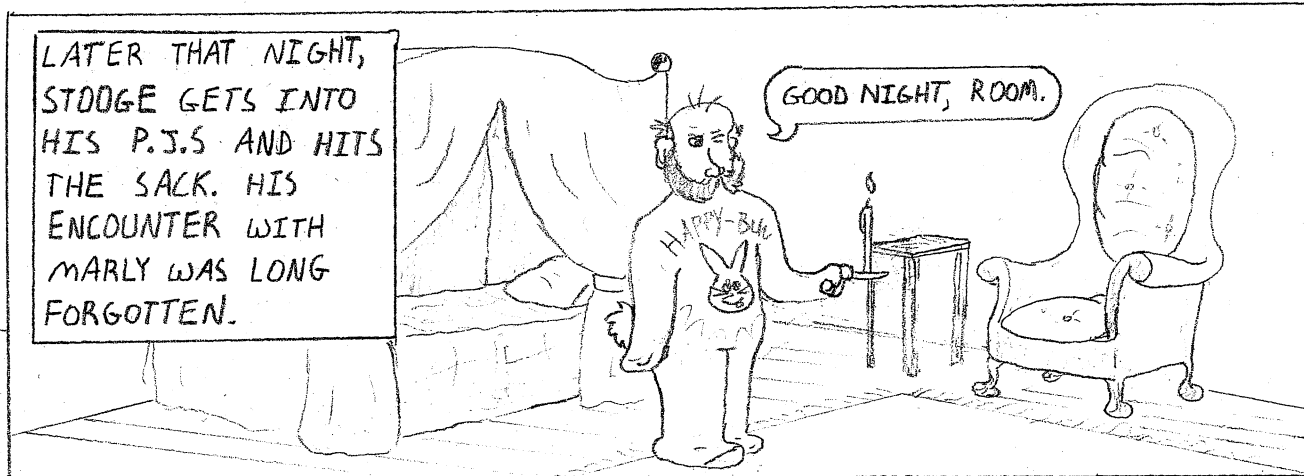
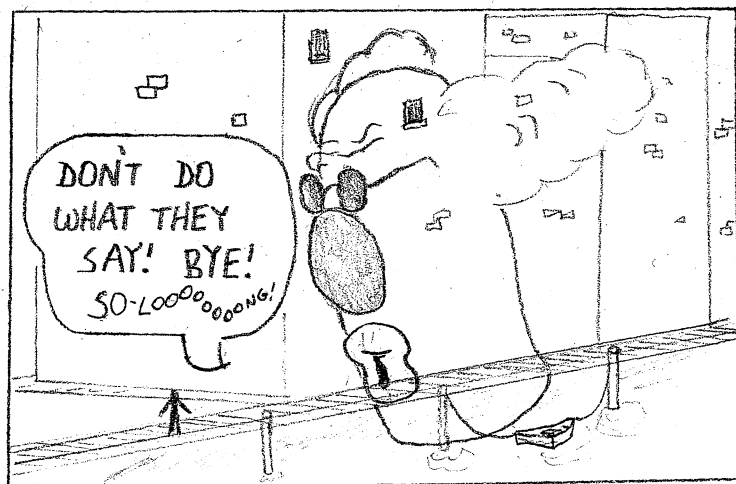




E. STOOG
AND
M. MARLY

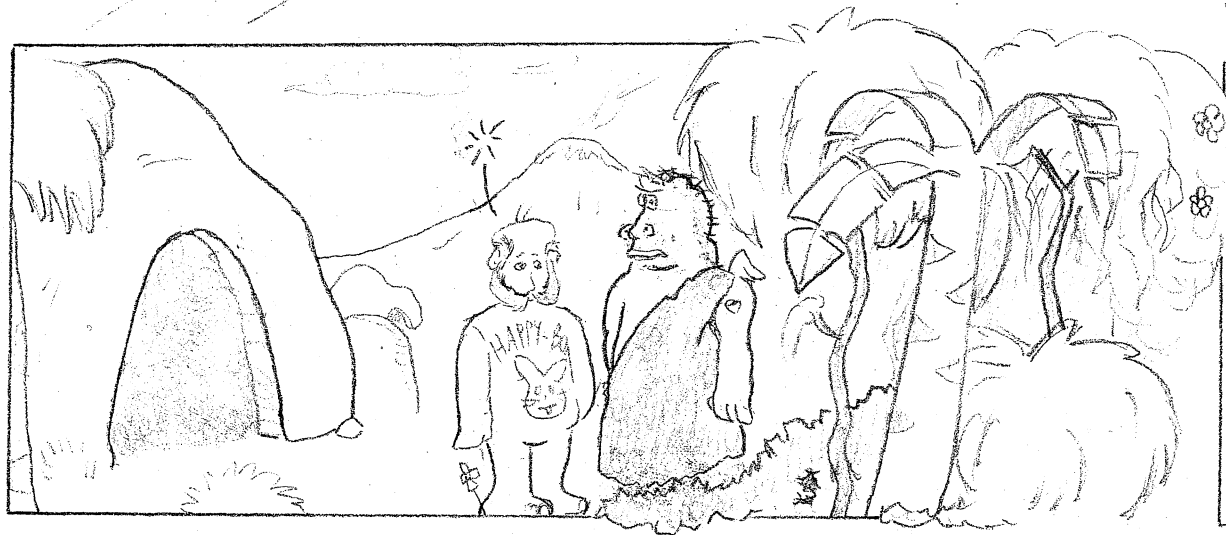
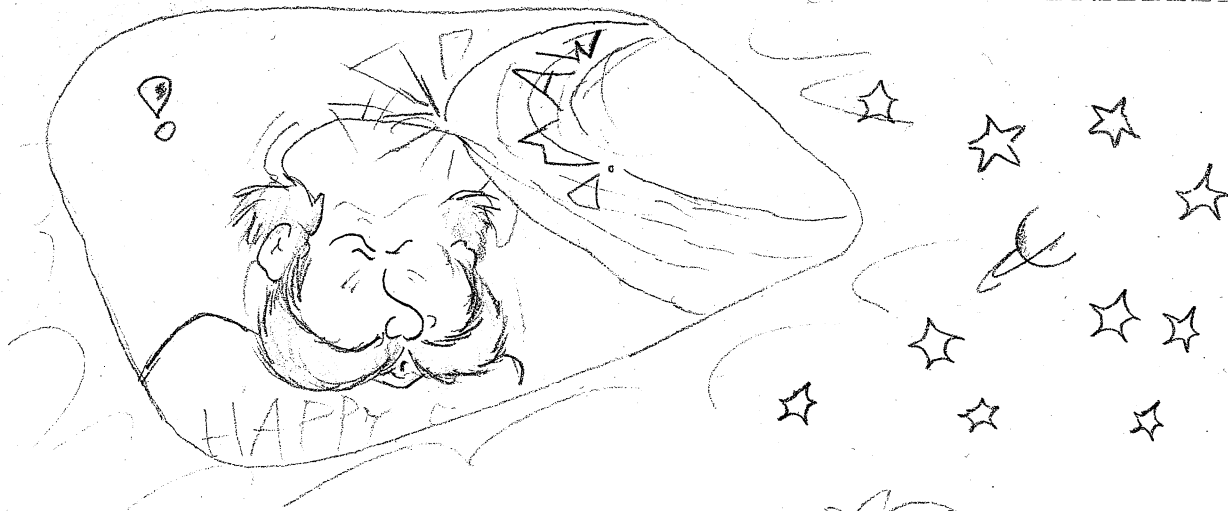
AND SO THE DAY WAS
FINISHED. STOOG CLOSED
SHOP AND WALKED THE
FOGGY STREETS TO HIS
HOME.



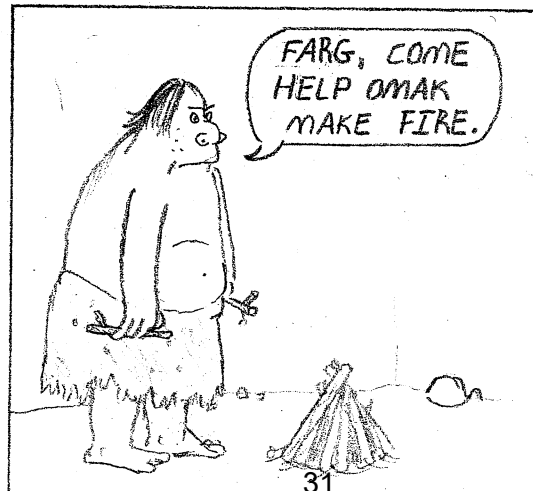


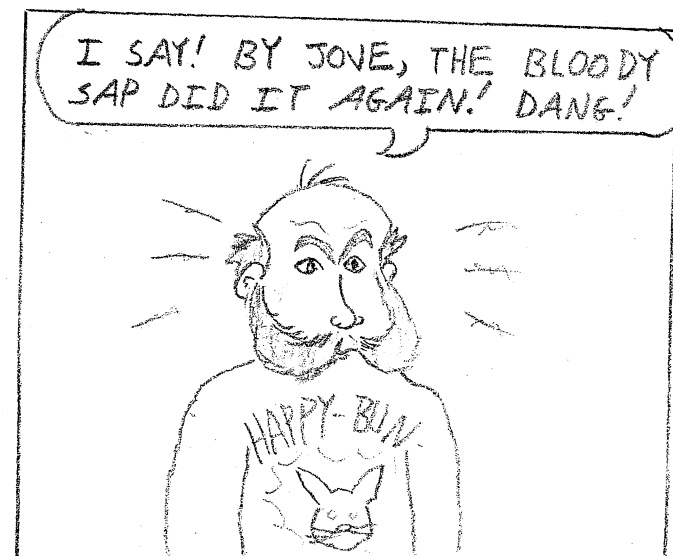
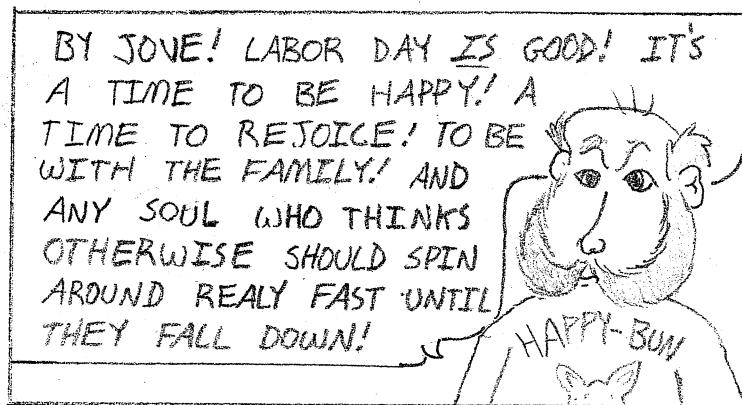
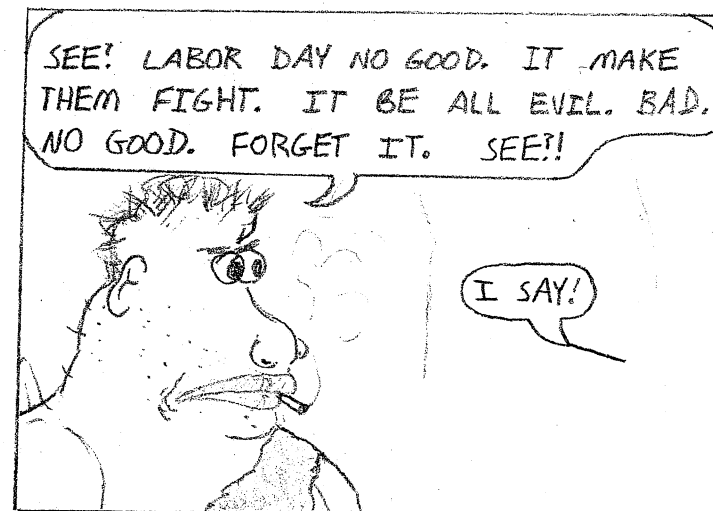
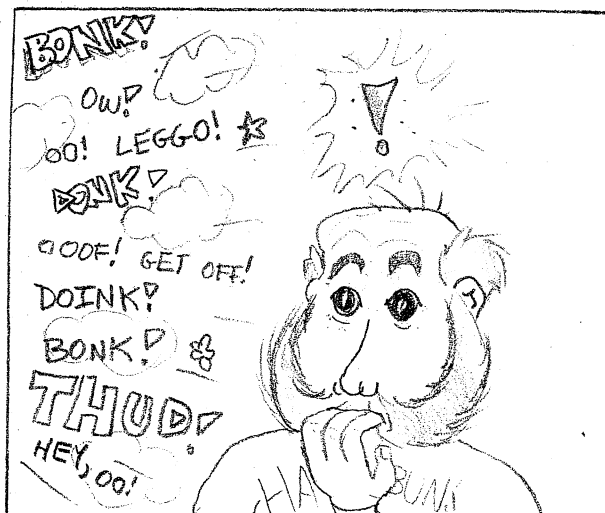
BUT AT 12:03 AND 8 SECONDS AM, THE FLITTER OF TINY WINGS BREAKS THE SILENCE.

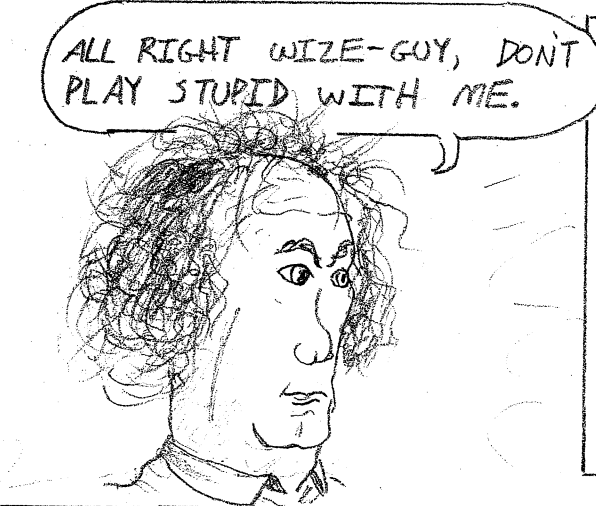
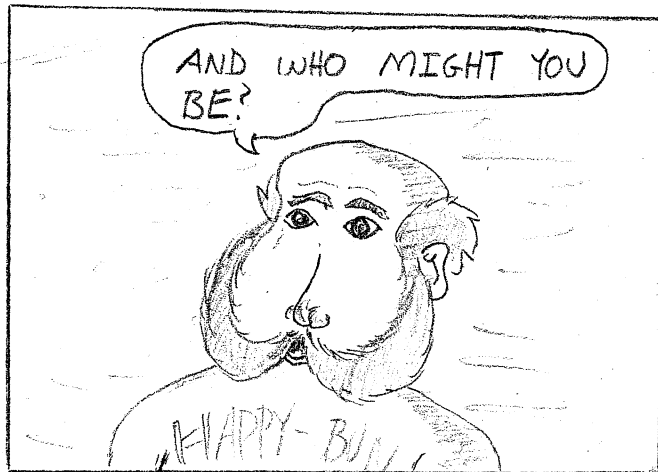
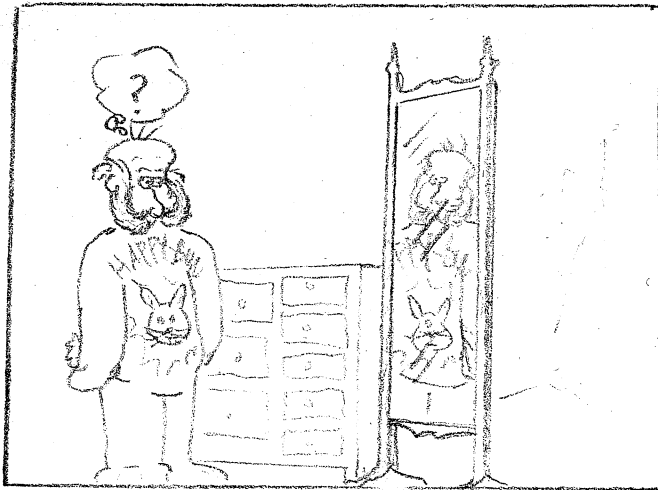


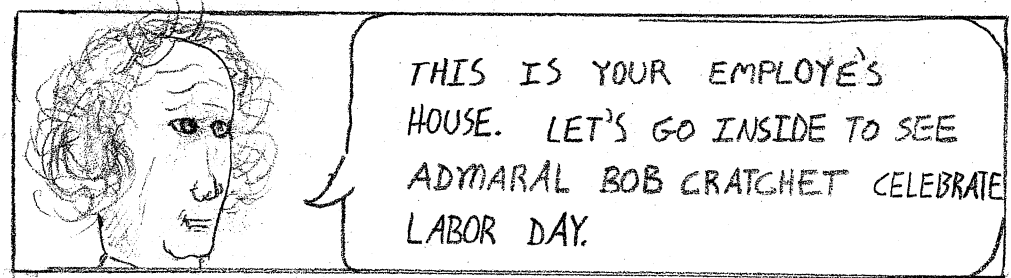


EBENEZER STODGE AND THAK ENTER A CAVE WHERE THEY SEE A CONVERSATION TAKE PLACE. ALTHOUGH THEY ARE PLAINLY VISIBLE, STODGE AND THAK GO UNNOTICED BY OMAK AND FARG.









LARY AND EBENEZER STOOGE BREAK INTO THE HOUSE THROUGH A WINDOW. (EMPHASSIS ON THE WORD "BREAK") AFTER CLEARING ALL THE BROKEN GLASS, THEY STEP INTO THE DINING ROOM.



STOOGEE AND LARRY WATCH AS THEY EAT THEIR
LABOR DAY FEAST OF FRIES AND SPAM-MUSH.

WE MUST BE GRATEFUL
FOR STOOGE, THE FOUNDER OF OUR
FEAST!

HMMMPH.



THE SAP PAYS ME SO MUCH
THAT IF HE WONT CUT MY
P.R. NOW, WE WONT BE ABLE
TO KEEP THE BLOODY SHOP MUCH
LONGER! HA!

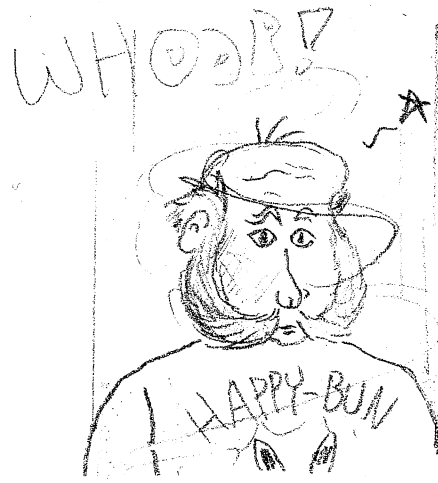
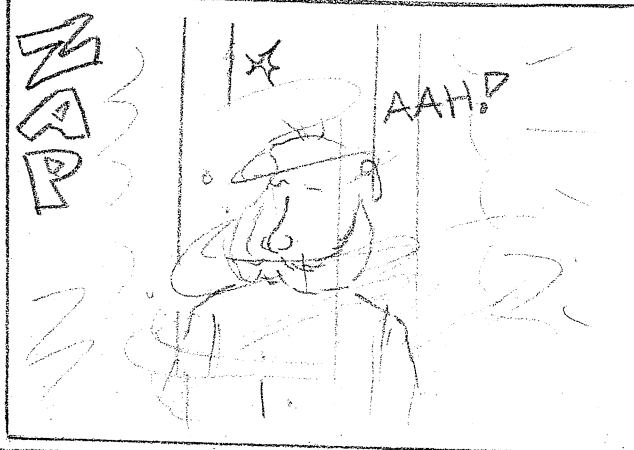
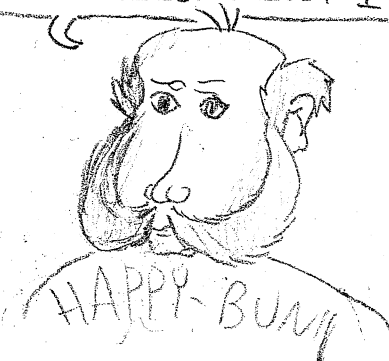


THE
TWIT??

DEAR!

I SAY...

WELL IF THATS THE
WAY HE FEELS ABOUT IT-



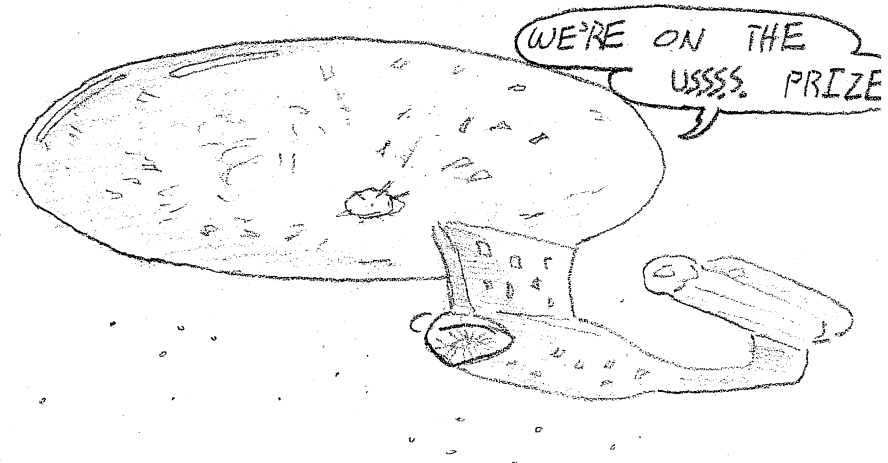
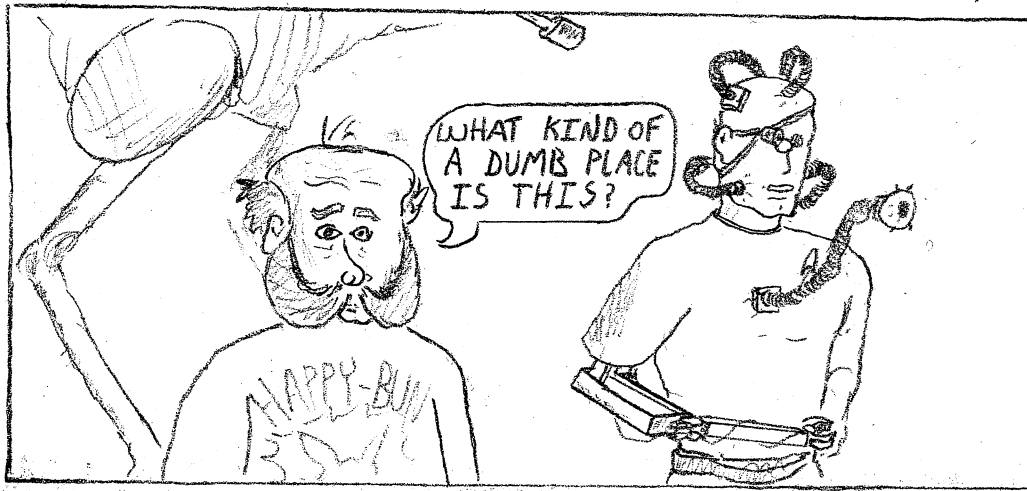
HEH HEH.
... HEH.
UH, HI!

WORDS FAIL
ME.



MY NAME IS
AXLG174Z OF
LABOR DAY FUTURE.
COME WITH
ME!





AFTERWORD

Life After Zo

Or, there's no area like the one that is called home

Dorthy's [sic] quest of returning home, Kafkaesque and freighted with Odyssean "twists and turns," resonates with me today as much as it did when I authored and illustrated this graphic novella a quarter century ago. Return, after all, is the very fabric of humanity's most cherished and enduring stories. It is the central theme of the *Odyssey*, the great epic of the Greeks. It is the core of Virgil's *Aeneid*, which movingly opens with the pity-inducing image of Aeneas fleeing the burning city of Troy with his family, and closes with our uprooted protagonist forging a new home in a far and distant land. The Roman legend of Orpheus has its protagonist travel into the underworld in a heroic attempt to rescue his love interest Eurydice and bring her home; alas, it was a journey famously thwarted by fate. And the themes of home and return inform the nonfiction writings of Salman Rushdie, Joan Didion, and Edward Said, all authors who have had a formative influence in my own writing. In retrospect, I view *The Wizard of Zo* as a kind of *summa* of all the stories and myths which give shape and form to the instinctive and innately human need to root oneself.

As I reflect on the past twenty-five years (or what I often refer to as my "life after Zo"), events both cosmic and local have caused me to reflect again on place, home, locating oneself, and finding one's way whilst navigating life's unforeseen twists and turns. And the protagonists of *Zo* beautifully demonstrate that the journey home is a communal one. As one accomplished literary scholar noted about this story's theme with arresting clarity (though I can't at the moment recall his name), "Home requires individual initiative, but it also requires the help of one's family and community." Could Dorthy [sic] have cleared the sky of thousands of X-Wings without the capable assistance of an improbably huge lion weaponized with a rocket launcher and a laser-scope? Perhaps. After all, she has spunk, spirit, and indefatigable resolve. But her lion-friend certainly made the battle much less of a drag. In his essay *The Decay of Lying*, Oscar Wilde famously wrote that "life imitates art more than art imitates life," and I certainly see the shape of my own life anticipated within these pages. Indeed, I see all of humanity in this graphic novella. We all are Todo [sic], whose very name, derived as it is from the Latin *totus* ("total" or "all"), emphatically situates this ambiguous creature as a metaphor for collective humanity. In *The Wizard of Zo*, Todo [sic] is a creature only briefly noted, appearing ever-after only as an indeterminate spec riding a swift conveyor-belt toward the distant horizon. In conclusion, I shall defer to the immortal words of the Roman poet Horace: "*Mutato nomine de te fabula narrator.*" [Change only the name, and the story is about us].

Jhonny Wruskin
October 2020

