

Whistles



Chapter 3

Rofflegangers

By Andrew Hussie

AFTER LEARNING OF HER RINGMASTER'S UNEXPECTED RETURN TO THE STARLIGHT CALLIOPE, DOODLEBEAN WAS FORCED TO FLEE FOR COVER, DEEP IN THE DARKENED CIRCUS BOWELS. DEEPER STILL IS THE MYSTERY SURROUNDING HIS REAPPEARANCE, AND THE PUZZLING QUESTIONS SHE MUST NOW FACE.



WHERE DID PENDLECOAT COME FROM? I DON'T UNDERSTAND HOW HE COULD HAVE RETURNED SO SUDDENLY, AND WHY HE'S NOT HURT. DOES THIS MEAN WHISTLES IS HERE TOO?



I CAN'T BELIEVE HE'S BACK. IT'S JUST SICKENING. AND HIS STENCH... UGH! I CAN STILL SMELL IT.

SNIF...



IT'S EVEN GETTING STRONGER. HIS SMELL IS EVERYWHERE. YUCK.





NOTHING HAS
CHANGED IN THIS
CIRCUS AT ALL!



HEY, DOODLEBEAN.
GOOD TO SEE YOU.



HUH? WHO'S
THERE?!



JUST ME. I
WORK HERE. I'M GLAD
TO SEE YOU'RE SAFE,
FOR NOW AT LEAST.

ALRIGHT,
JUST PUT THAT
THING DOWN!

YOU SHOULD GO,
DOODLEBEAN. LEAVE THE
CIRCUS. MAYBE YOU CAN
FIND WHISTLES.



YOU KNOW WHERE
WHISTLES IS?!





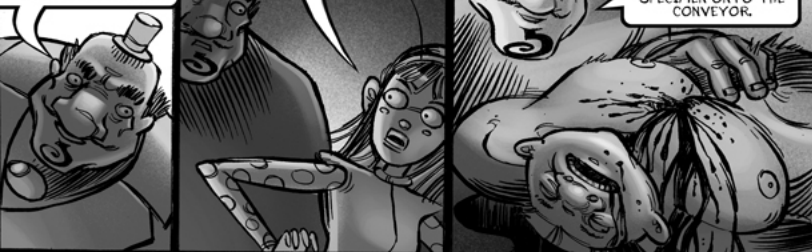
EEEK!

BAM

SALUTATIONS, MY DEAR! IF I'D NOT SUCH STALWART CONFIDENCE IN MY OWN AFFABILITY, I'D SAY YOU WERE FRIGHTENED. A QUIVERING SLENDER WILLOW COME, LET THIS OLD FELLOW REASSURE YOU WITH A PATERNAL EMBRACE.

STAY AWAY!
DON'T YOU REALIZE
I HATE YOU?

WHY, WHAT CARELESSNESS, YOU WEREN'T ABOUT TO LET GOOD MEAT SPOIL NOW, LASS? HELP ME GATHER THE HEFT OF THIS SPECIMEN ONTO THE CONVEYOR.



URG...

YOU'RE SICK!
LEAVE ME
ALONE!!



HURRY NOW! THE PAIR OF US WILL MAKE LIGHT WORK OF IT. OH, YES, HE'LL MAKE FOR SPLENDID VICTUALS. IF OUR TIMING IS RIGHT, WE MIGHT SEE HIM AGAIN ONCE HIS PORTIONS ARE SERVED IN THE SUPPER TENT!



BUMP

MEANWHILE, WHISTLES AND GUMBLIN, WITH A RENEWED CAMARADERIE, STREAK TOWARDS THE STARLIGHT CALLIOPE TO AID DOODLEBEAN.

BLAST. NEARLY EMPTY. WE'LL NEED ANOTHER SOURCE OF TRANSPORTATION.

HEY, LOOK UP THERE! CAN YOU LAND THERE, GUMBLIN?





THIS IS WHERE THE GOVERNESS OF HUMANS LIVES. I USED TO KNOW HER WHEN I WORKED FOR JASPER. SHE WAS A REALLY GOOD CLIENT, AND SHE'S REALLY NICE!

I DID NOT REALIZE YOU PURSUED AN ALTERNATIVE TRADE IN YOUR ABSENCE FROM THE CIRCUS. WAS A TROUPE OF STREET-CLOWNS RECRUITING?

NO, I WAS A MALE PROSTITUTE!



YOU DON'T MEAN... THE CRAFT OF FLESH?

THE OLDEST PROFESSION?

I'M NOT SURE.

OLDEST? WHAT'S THAT? LIKE A CAVEMAN?



NO, NO. A CARNAL ENTERPRISE, WHISTLES. SELLING SEXUAL SERVICE. THAT'S WHAT YOU DID?

I GUESS SO.



WHISTLES, I AM TROUBLED BY THIS. I HARDLY KNOW WHAT TO SAY.

OK, I WILL GO INSIDE.



NO, WHISTLES, YOU SHOULDN'T. THIS... THIS IS IMPROPRIETY AT ITS HIGHEST ECHELON. DON'T YOU KNOW A GREAT PERFORMER MUST OBSERVE A CHASTE, HUMBLE EXISTENCE?

I THINK SO.



I DON'T THINK YOU DO, WHISTLES. OUR ABILITY TO ENTERTAIN WILL ONLY BE AS PURE AS OUR BODIES AND OUR SOULS. SUCCUMBING TO BASE IMPURITIES, YIELDING TO WORLDLY GRATIFICATIONS, THESE SURELY ARE THE PATH TO RUIN.

I SEE YOUR NEED FOR GUIDANCE PROBES FAR DEEPER THAN I THOUGHT. I MUST TEACH YOU THE REFINED ART FORM, PROFOUND WISDOM, AND HIDDEN JOYS OF SHAME. ARE YOU FAMILIAR WITH SHAME, WHISTLES?



BUT THEN, PERHAPS WITH SHAME, YOU MAY NEVER HAVE REACHED SUCH HEIGHTS OF GREATNESS? MAYBE THIS EQUATION IS MORE COMPLICATED THAN I THOUGHT. QUITE A MYSTIFICATION...

YES, OK. I WILL GO INSIDE THEN. I THINK SHE CAN HELP US!

THIRTY MINUTES LATER.

YOU HAVEN'T LOST
YOUR TOUCH AT ALL,
WHISTLES.

THANKS!

SO YOU NEED
TRANSPORT. YOU'LL
HAVE THE BEST, I PROMISE.
I CAN UNDERSTAND YOUR
DESIRE TO GO HOME, BUT
WHAT'S THE HURRY?

OH, THERE
ARE SOME PROBLEMS
BACK AT THE CIRCUS.
PEOPLE ARE
IN TROUBLE, I
THINK, SO WE HAVE
TO GO THERE
AND HELP.

I SEE. THERE
WILL BE DARK CLOUDS
WAITING FOR YOU,
WHISTLES. PLEASE
BE CAREFUL.

DON'T WORRY!
GUMBLIN IS ALONG
TO HELP. HE'S GOING
TO TEACH ME THE
JOYS OF SHAME!

I CERTAINLY
HOPE NOT. WISH
HIM LUCK FOR
ME AS WELL.
NOT THAT YOU
NEED TO, SINCE
HE'S LISTENING
IN ON US. TAKE
CARE, GUMBLIN.

I HAVEN'T HEARD
ANYTHING!





STAY AWAY FROM ME, ALL OF YOU!

NOW, NOW, MY DEAR, BECOMING WARM AND FLUSTERED UNDER THE BLOUSE WILL LAND YOU IN NOTHING IF NOT A PREDICAMENT.

I BELIEVE THERE IS SOME HARD CANDY IN MY BREAST POCKET, IF YOU'LL LET ME RETRIEVE IT.

EXCELLENT THINKING! YOUNG LADIES DO LOVE CANDIES. I CAN THINK OF NOTHING MORE SUITABLE FOR THE MOMENT!

AH, HERE IT IS! NOW RELAX YOURSELF, LASS, AND ACCEPT THESE KINDLY OFFERED SWEETS.



STAY AWAY! I DON'T WANT YOUR STUPID CANDY!

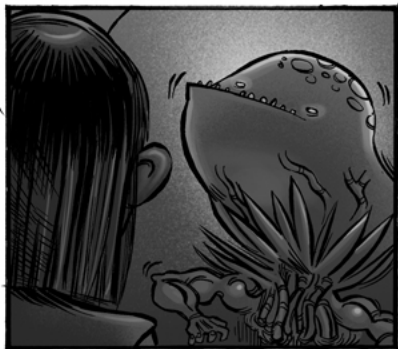
I SAID STAY AWAY.







HUH?
WHAT NOW?





LOOK, WE'RE ALMOST THERE! THIS IS REALLY EXCITING!

YES, BUT NOW WE'LL HAVE TO LAND THIS INFERNAL CONTRAPTION. THE CONTROLS ARE SO UNINTUITIVE IT'S A WONDER WE'VE COME THIS FAR.

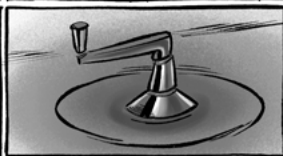
OH, ONE OF THESE FUNKY COLORED BLINKY THINGS MUST LET US LAND.

YES, BUT WHICH BLINKY THING?



HAVE YOU TRIED HONKING THE HORNS?

OF COURSE.



OH, LOOK! MAYBE IF YOU WIND THIS THING LIKE A JACK-IN-THE-BOX...

YOU THINK THAT HASN'T OCCURRED TO ME ALREADY?!





CRASH!



HELP!



WHISTLES, I'M STEPPING OUTSIDE TO HELP DOODLEBEAN, YOU SHOULD WAIT INSIDE.

DONT YOU NEED HELP?

NO, YOU NEED TO STAY HERE... TO GUARD THE PIES.

OF COURSE, I WILL DO MY BEST.





BRAK
BRAK
BRAK
BRAK
BRAK
BRAK
BRAK



WHISTLES...

HELLO!



UM, HI. MY NAME IS DOODLEBEAN.

I KNOW WHO YOU ARE, DOODLEBEAN. HI!

ER...



WOW, I DIDN'T THINK YOU KNEW ME. I JUST THOUGHT...

YES, I'VE SEEN YOU AT THE CIRCUS, BACK-STAGE BEFORE SHOWS. GUMBLIN AND I HAVE COME BACK TO HELP YOU.

REALLY? OH YOU CERTAINLY CAME JUST IN TIME!

WHISTLES.

HUH?





WINCE



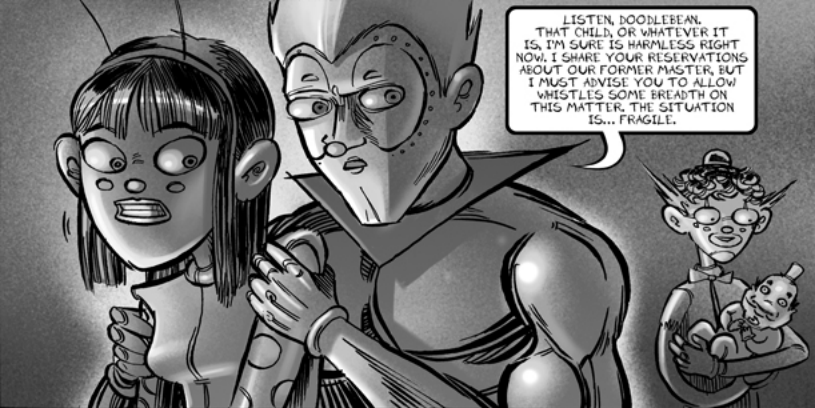
YOU GUYS,
CAN WE LEAVE NOW?
THIS PLACE IS
REALLY MAKING ME
FEEL WEIRD.





WHISTLES, GET
INSIDE THE SHIP. WE
HAVE TO GO.



AAH!
WHAT IS THAT?
WHISTLES, GET
IT OFF THE
SHIP!



LISTEN, DOODLEBEAN. THAT CHILD, OR WHATEVER IT IS, I'M SURE IS HARMLESS RIGHT NOW. I SHARE YOUR RESERVATIONS ABOUT OUR FORMER MASTER, BUT I MUST ADVISE YOU TO ALLOW WHISTLES SOME BREATH ON THIS MATTER. THE SITUATION IS... FRAGILE.



I UNDERSTAND, GUMBLIN. I'LL TRY TO BE SENSITIVE ABOUT IT.

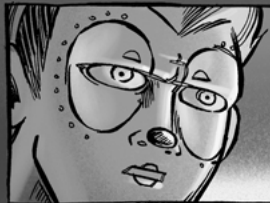
BURBLE...
BURBLE...



SIGH

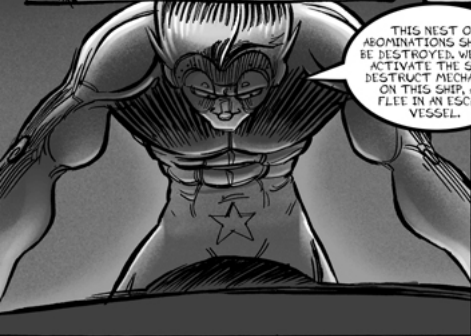


OF COURSE, I SHOULDN'T HAVE BEEN SHOCKED. IT'S NO SURPRISE THAT WHISTLES WOULD SHOW COMPASSION FOR EVEN THE LOATHSOME PENDINGCOAT WHEN IN THE FORM OF A HELPLESS, INNOCENT CHILD. HE'S SO KINDHEARTED.



WE MUST LEAVE IMMEDIATELY. THE STAR-LIGHT CALLIOPE HAS BECOME IRRETRIEVABLY CORRUPT. THERE IS NO SALVATION FOR IT, SADLY.

IT MAKES ME SAD TOO, GUMELIN. BUT I THINK YOU'RE RIGHT. WHAT'S YOUR PLAN?



THIS NEST OF ABOMINATIONS SHOULD BE DESTROYED. WE WILL ACTIVATE THE SELF-DESTRUCT MECHANISM ON THIS SHIP, AND FLEE IN AN ESCAPE VESSEL.



DAMN THIS GADGETRY! THERE MUST BE A WAY.



WHISTLE'S, COME HERE AND LOOK AT THIS.

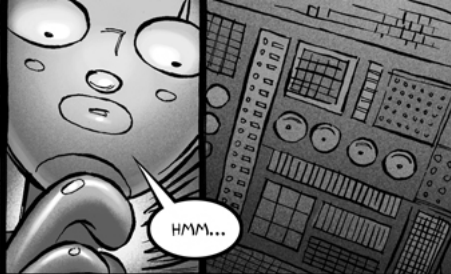


OK, PLEASE HOLD HIM FOR ME, DOODLEBEAN.

UM...



I AM LEFT WITH NO CHOICE, WHISTLES, BUT TO RESORT TO YOUR SPECIAL GIFTS. I JUST HOPE THEY MAY APPLY HERE. CAN YOU LOCATE THE CORRECT CONTROLS?



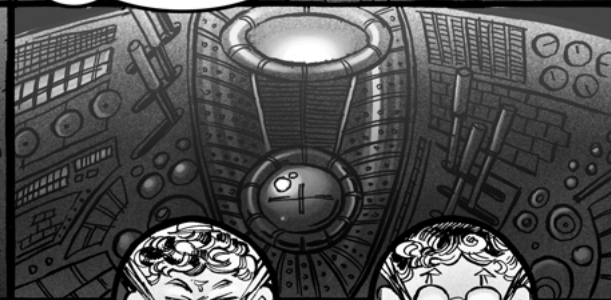
HMM...



FOCUS. DRAW FROM YOUR DEEPEST FEELINGS, WHISTLES. WHERE WITHIN YOUR SPIRIT THE MOST ROBUST PLUSSANCES RESIDE.



IF WE CANNOT LEAVE HERE, AND WIPE OUT THIS ROTTEN RECESS OF CRIMINALITY, YOU COULD LOSE EVERYTHING. EVERYTHING YOU LOVE WILL BE GONE!

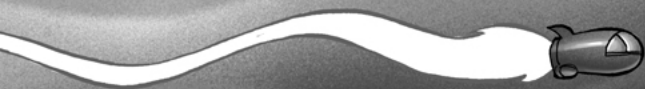




WITH ANY LUCK,
THE SCOURGE OF THE
STARLIGHT CALLIOPE HAS
MET ITS END.

OH WELL. AT
LEAST IT'S NOT A
TOTAL LOSS.

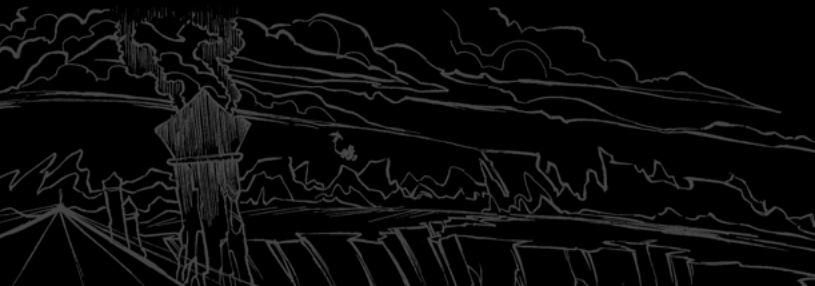
THAT'S THE
SPIRIT, WHISTLES.
WHO KNOWS, MAYBE LIFE
OUTSIDE THE CIRCUS
WILL BE FUN!



THE WAYWARD STARS OF THE STARLIGHT CALLIOPE TOGETHER
RIDE TOWARDS DESTINY. THE CIRCUS IS NO MORE. THE SOUZMONIUMS
AND HARMONOPHONES HAVE FALLEN SILENT. LIONS GO UNTAMED.
NO ONE SWELLS THE CORN, AND THE CHILDREN'S EAGER MOUTHS GO
UNFILLED. WHAT WILL TOMORROW BRING?

To Be Continued.

ÉPILOGUE



THE STARLIGHT CALLIOPE
HAS LOST ITS DIRECTION.

WE CANNOT PROCEED
WITHOUT A STAR.

WITHOUT A STAR, THE CIRCUS
WILL FALTER. THE FLESH WILL NOT
FLOW, AND THE VINES WILL WITHER.

WE NEED A NEW STAR.

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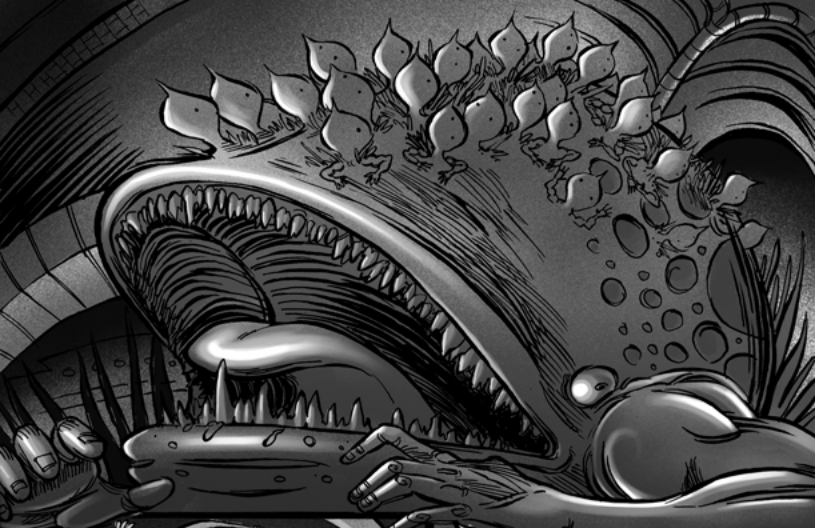
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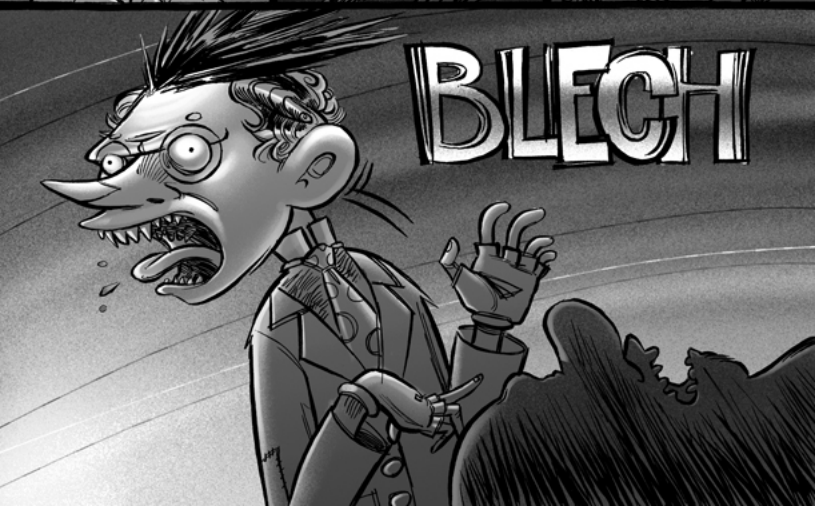
WE NEED A NEW STAR.









Sugarshoe






THIS MUST BE SOME SORT OF ABSURD FARCEL YOU SHOULD BE AWARE OF MY EXTENSIVE CULINARY AND MORAL MISGIVINGS ABOUT EATING MEAT. THIS WILL NOT DO AT ALL. IT'S SO GROSS!




BUT I NEVERTHELESS REMAIN YOUR GRATEFUL OFFSPRING. LOYALTY AND WARM FEELINGS ARE PARAMOUNT IN A FAMILY, DON'T YOU AGREE?



UH, I GUESS SO.



AND YOUR DEVOTION AS A PARENT IN MY MIND IS BEYOND QUESTION. I THINK YOU WOULD DO ANYTHING FOR YOUR CHERISHED SPAWN, NO? WHY, THE BOND MUST BE STRONG, HAVING NURTURED ME IN THE WOMB... OF YOUR MOUTH, I GUESS? I'M NOT SURE HOW IT WORKS, ACTUALLY. IT'S PROBABLY PRETTY DISGUSTING.



ANYWAY, DOES YOUR DEVOTION NOT BRING YOU JOY? YOUR SELFLESSNESS, DOES IT NOT BRING MEANING?



WELL... YES. I THINK SO.

I FEEL AT EASE WITH YOU, MY CARING PROGENITOR, SWADDLED IN YOUR SOFT LEAVES. REALLY SOFT! SUCH DELICATE FLESH, LIKE A FLOWER PETAL, SO FULL OF VITAL ESSENCES, JUICES AND MINERALS.



OH, LOOK AT ME, MY MOUTH IS WATERING LIKE A STARVED DOG. HOW EMBARRASSING! I DON'T KNOW HOW TO ASK THIS, BUT...

NO, NEVER MIND.

WHAT IS IT?



WELL, ORDINARILY I WOULDN'T, BUT I'M JUST SO HUNGRY AND WEAK! IF I COULD TAKE BUT JUST A FEW TINY, NON-CRITICAL NIBBLES FROM YOUR SUMPTUOUS FRAME?

UH...

JUST TO HOLD ME OVER! YOU'LL BARELY EVEN FEEL IT!



ALRIGHT. JUST A LITTLE, MAYBE.



OF COURSE I WON'T EAT YOU, SILLY! I WAS JOKING! THAT'S WHAT CLOWNS DO! THEY JOKE AND PLAY PRANKS!

I'M JUST GOING TO SIT RIGHT DOWN AND EAT THIS SILLY OLD DEAD CLOWN WHERE'S MY BEE? I CAN'T WAIT TO BITE INTO THIS ELICATED MOUND OF GRISTLE AND SINEW, AND GUZZLE PINT AFTER PINT OF ROOM-TEMPERATURE BLOOD, AND...

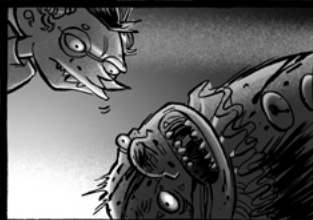


SN-ICK-ER





I FEEL GREAT!
ALL THIS DINING, I
NEARLY FORGOT I HAVE
A SHOW TO RUN!



Next Chapter:

a hardly
quintessential
harlequin



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