



ALL RIGHT, ALL RIGHT, *FIENDISH FANS*... YOUR PLEAS, SCREAMS, AND THREATS HAVE NOT BEEN IGNORED! FOR THE PAST COUPLE OF ISSUES WE'VE BEEN NEGLECTING A FEATURE DEAR TO EVERYONE'S HEARTS (THOSE OF YOU WHO *HAVE* A HEART)... *THE CREEPY CLASSIC!* SO LET'S IMMEDIATELY HOP BACK INTO THE *SCREAM-STREAM* WITH THE WEIRD WONDER OF *EDGAR ALLAN POE'S*...

# HOP-FROG!

NEVER WAS ANYONE SO KEENLY ALIVE TO A JOKE AS THE KING ... AND, UPON THE WHOLE, PRACTICAL JOKES SUITED HIS TASTE FAR BETTER THAN VERBAL ONES. NO ONE BETTER SUITED HIS TASTE AS OBJECT FOR JEST THAN THE COURT FOOL, *HOP-FROG!*

IN TRUTH, THE FOOL STRIDES BETTER ON HIS HANDS THAN WITH HIS CRIPPLE LEGS ... NOT HALF SO AMUSING!

COME, HOP-FROG! YOUR TRICKS BORE US... BE FUNNY! YOU NEED SOMEONE TO SHOW YOU HOW... *FANG!*



AND IF THE KING GLORIFIED IN A FINE JOKE, NO LESS DID HIS TWO HIGH COUNCILLORS... ALL MEN OF FINE HUMOR!

HAHAHAHA, HOP-FROG! HOW'S YOUR PLAYMATE? OR SHOULD I HOUND YOU? HOHOHOHO!

HE DOESN'T MIND... THE DWARF'S A GAY DOG HIMSELF! HAHAHAHA!



AND IF KING AND COUNCIL HELD THE JESTER TO RIDICULE, ONE FAVORITE OF THE COURT DID NOT...

PLEASE, YOUR MAJESTY...CALL OFF YOUR DOG! BEFORE HOP-FROG'S HURT... PLEASE!

HAHAHAHA...HOW CAN ONE SO UGLY AND MISHAPEN BE A COUNTRYMAN OF YOURS, TRIPPETTA? HOHOHOHO...VERY WELL, LITTLE ONE, DANCE FOR ME AND I'LL CALL OFF THE HOUND!



POOR HOP-FROG...ARE YOU INJURED? DID HE HURT YOU?

AS ALWAYS, TRIPPETTA, YOU'VE SAVED ME IN TIME! ONLY MY FEELINGS ARE HURT...ONLY MY PRIDE INJURED...



AWAY WITH YOU, FOOL! WHO WANTS TO BEHOLD A JESTER WITH A SAD FACE? AWAY ON YOUR TOAD'S LEGS BEFORE I CLAP YOU IN THE KENNEL WITH FANG! HAHAHAHAHA!



THE NAME "HOP-FROG" WAS NOT THE DWARF'S FROM BIRTH, BUT WAS GIVEN HIM IN A MOMENT OF HIGH SPIRITS AND FINE HUMOR BY THE KING AND HIS COUNCILLORS DUE TO HIS INABILITY TO WALK AS OTHER MEN DO... BUT HE WAS EXCEEDINGLY AGILE AND STRONG WHEN USING HIS ARMS... AND HE ADORED THE GRACEFUL AND EXQUISITE TRIPPETTA...



THERE CAME A FESTIVE OCCASION AND A MASQUERADE BALL WAS TO BE HELD...THE WHOLE COURT BUSIED THEMSELVES WITH PICKING COSTUMES, IN FEVERISH EXPECTATION ... ALL SAVE THE KING AND HIS COUNCIL, WHO SOUGHT ADVICE IN THE MATTER...

GIVE US THE BENEFIT OF YOUR INVENTION, HOP-FROG ... SOMETHING NOVEL... WE'RE WEARY OF SAMENESS! COME, DRINK! THE WINE WILL BRIGHTEN YOUR WITS!

S-SIRE, I CANNOT DRINK ... WINE HAS ILL EFFECT ON ME!



TO REFUSE MY WINE IS TO INSULT MY HOSPITALITY... COME, FOOL, DRINK I SAY! **DRINK!**

AH! HAHahaha! SEE WHAT A GLASS OF GOOD WINE CAN DO... WHY YOUR EYES ARE SHINING ALREADY!

= GASP = ...  
SPUTTER...



NOW TO BUSINESS! WE STAND IN NEED OF COSTUMES--THE THREE OF US! COME, COME, HAVE YOU **NOTHING** TO SUGGEST?

CAN'T THINK! PERHAPS ANOTHER GLASS WILL ENLIVEN YOUR DULL MIND... YOU HEAR ME, FOOL? **DRINK!**

T-THE WINE... MY HEAD IS SPINNING... CAN'T THINK...

PLEASE... NO MORE... PLEASE...





VARLET! WOULD YOU ARGUE WITH YOUR KING? *I SAID DRINK!*

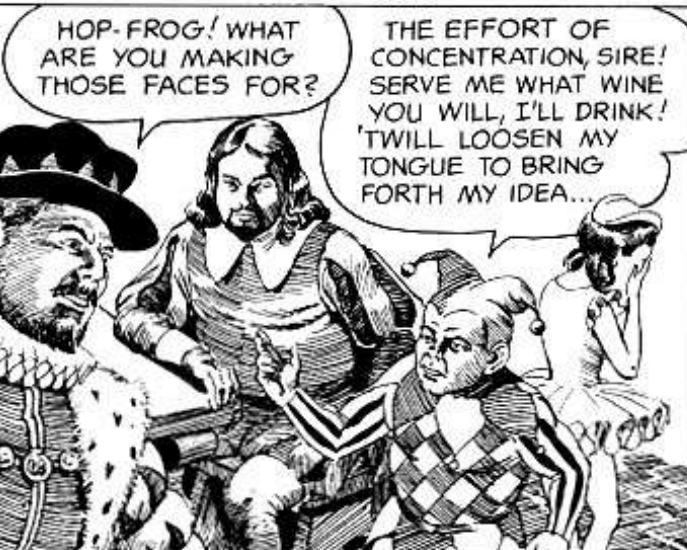
HAVE MERCY, YOUR MAJESTY! IT'S NOT GOOD FOR HIM... YOU SHOULDN'T--



*MUST YOU CONSTANTLY INTERFERE?!*



THERE WAS A DEAD SILENCE FOR ABOUT HALF A MINUTE, DURING WHICH THE FALLING OF A LEAF OR A FEATHER MIGHT HAVE BEEN HEARD...



HOP-FROG! WHAT ARE YOU MAKING THOSE FACES FOR?

THE EFFORT OF CONCENTRATION, SIRE! SERVE ME WHAT WINE YOU WILL, I'LL DRINK! 'Twill LOOSEN MY TONGUE TO BRING FORTH MY IDEA...



...WHEN IT CAME TO MIND, I'M NOT SURE. PERHAPS *JUST AFTER* YOU FLUNG THE WINE IN THE GIRL'S FACE... THE DIVERSION CAME TO ME! A SPLENDID FROLIC OFTEN ENACTED IN MY OWN COUNTRY'S MASQUERADES... UNFORTUNATELY, IT REQUIRES A COMPANY OF *THREE*...



HERE WE *ARE!* THREE EXACTLY... COME! WHAT IS THE MASQUERADE?

THE THREE CHAINED OURANG-OUTANGS EXCELLENT SPORT IF WELL ENACTED...



...THE BEAUTY OF THE GAME LIES IN THE FRIGHT IT CAUSES ... ESPECIALLY AMONG THE LADIES! I WILL EQUIP YOU... LEAVE **ALL** TO ME!

**MARVELOUS**, HOP-FROG ... WE'LL DO IT! WE'LL DO IT!



AND WITH THE DAY OF THE MASQUERADE AT HAND, HE TOOK CHARGE, SCURRYING ABOUT WITH AUTHORITY AND ENTHUSIASM...

SEE! THE RESEMBLANCE IS STRIKING ... THE ENTIRE COURT WILL TAKE YOU FOR REAL BEASTS!

THIS IS EXQUISITE! HOP-FROG, I WILL MAKE A MAN OF YOU!



CHECKING EACH AND EVERY DETAIL OF THE FESTIVITIES, FROM THE COSTUMES...

THE JANGLING CHAINS WILL CREATE CONFUSION AND ADD REALISM... YOU'LL APPEAR TO HAVE JUST ESCAPED YOUR KEEPERS!



TO THE PREPARATION OF THE GRAND SALOON ITSELF...

REMOVE IT! THE WAX DRIPPINGS WOULD RUIN THE DELICATE COSTUMES OF THE GUESTS... WALL TORCHES WILL DO AS WELL!



HOW MUCH LONGER MUST WE TARRY, JESTER? THESE COSTUMES ARE STIFLING...

'TIZ NEARLY MID-NIGHT... ALL THE MASQUERADERS WILL BE THERE! REMEMBER... GIVE FORTH WITH THE SAVAGE CRIES I TAUGHT YOU!

**S**PLENDIDLY COSTUMED REVELERS THROUGED THE OPULENT SALOON BY THE MIDNIGHT HOUR... AND NO SOONER HAD THE CLOCK CEASED STRIKING...



**T**HE EXCITEMENT AMONG THE MASQUERADERS WAS PRODIGIOUS... EVERYTHING THE KING AND HIS COUNCILLORS HAD HOPED FOR! WOMEN SWOONED WITH FRIGHT, AND HAD NOT WEAPONS BEEN BARRED FROM THE ROOM, THERE MIGHT HAVE BEEN BLOODSHED...



**A**S THE OURANG-OUTANGS FROLIC, THE DWARF GRASP THEIR CHAIN AT ITS INTERSECTION AND RAPIDLY INSERTED THE HOOK FROM WHICH THE CHANDELIER HAD HUNG...



**I**N A TWINKLING, HE WAS AT THE PULLEY CHAIN, HOISTING WITH ALL THE POWER IN HIS GREAT ARMS...





HOP-FROG!  
YOU VILLAIN!  
WHAT IS THIS?

LEAVE THEM TO  
ME! I'LL FIND OUT  
WHO THEY ARE!

HO, HA, HO, HO...  
BRAVE HOP-FROG! HA,  
HA, HA! HE'LL SAVE US!

HAHAHAHAHA! IT'S ONLY  
A JEST... A FINE JOKE!



HA  
HA  
HA!  
BRAVO!  
HO HO! HOP-FROG!



AH, HA! AH, HA!  
I BEGIN TO SEE  
WHO THESE  
PEOPLE ARE  
NOW!

HOP-FROG,  
TAKE CARE  
WITH THE TORCH  
...IT'S TOO CLOSE!  
THESE COSTUMES  
WILL EASILY BURN...  
YOUR JEST GOES  
TOO FAR!

I NOW SEE...  
DISTINCTLY!

YAHHRGHHH!



THEY ARE A GREAT KING WHO SULLIES A DEFENSELESS GIRL, AND HIS PRIVY-COUNCILLORS WHO ABET HIM IN THE OUTRAGE!



AS FOR MYSELF ... I AM SIMPLY HOP-FROG, THE JESTER ...

OWING TO THE HIGH COMBUSTIBILITY OF THE COSTUMES, THE DWARF HAD SCARCELY MADE AN END TO HIS SPEECH, THAN THE WORK OF VENGEANCE WAS COMPLETE ... THREE CORPSES SWUNG IN THEIR CHAINS, A FETID BLACKENED, HIDEOUS, AND INDISTINGUISHABLE MASS ...

HOP-FROG DISAPPEARED THROUGH THE SKY-LIGHT ... IT WAS SUPPOSED THAT TRIPPETTA, STATIONED ON THE ROOF, HAD BEEN HIS ACCOMPLICE AND TOGETHER THEY ESCAPED INTO THE NIGHT; FOR NEITHER WAS EVER SEEN AGAIN!



--AND THIS IS MY LAST JEST!



LOOKS LIKE HOP-FROG HAD SORT OF A *FIERY* TEMPER, EH, BOYS AND GHOULS? AT LEAST HIS LITTLE JOKE PROVIDED THE KING WITH A PRETTY *HOT* TIME! NOW, I BET YOU'RE, JUST *BURNING* TO TRY MY NEXT NEFARIOUS NUMBER ...

