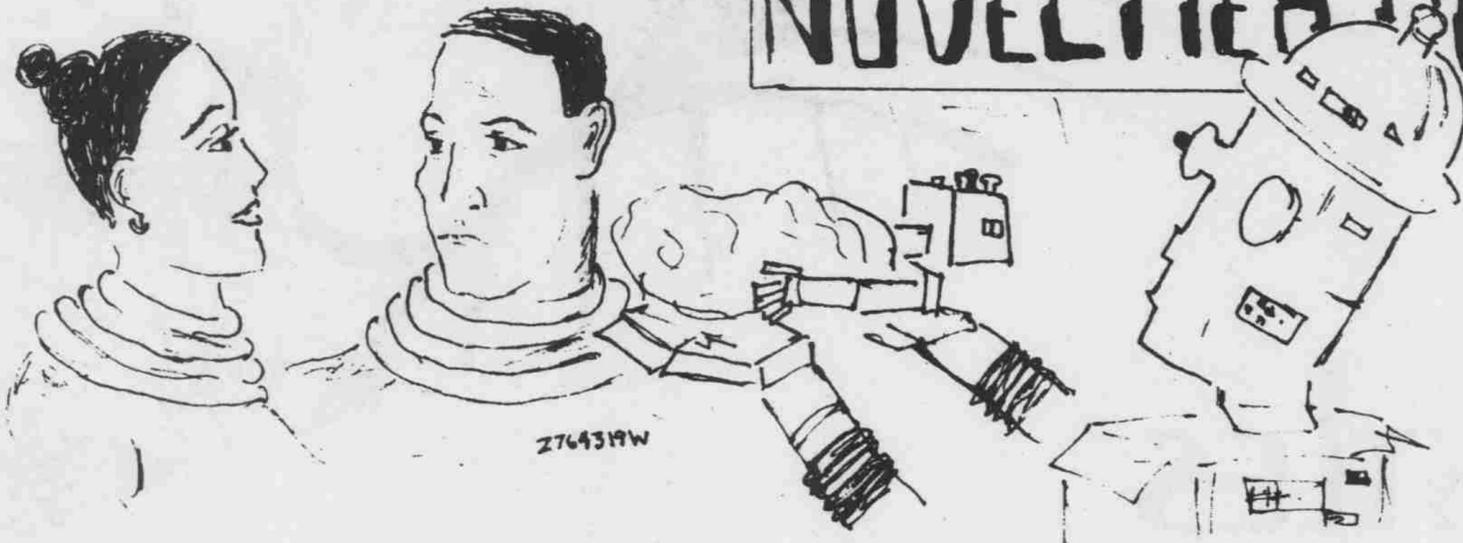


# NOVELTIES DEPT



chilly today."

They took the skybus to the Super-O-Store market and asked in the novelties department about the ad.

"A fine selection," the robot clerk answered. "The very latest in microchips."

"Electric?" David inquired cautiously. "No, solar. No more 4 a.m. feedings! Doesn't even wake up until you hold it up to a light for 10 pilifs."

Debbie tugged at David's arm.

"I want a live one," she said.

"What?" David said.

"What?" The robot almost dropped the squirming child. "I'm afraid you'll have to go down to the Pet Corner. Gate II, Concourse B." It put the baby back into the case and slammed the sales window shut.

"What?" David repeated.

"I want a live one. I can handle it. I've seen historic doc-u-dramas on it." She

lowered her voice. "I even saw one born once."

"Debbie . . . maybe we ought to go on vacation. Just the two of us."

"Stop patronizing me. I'm not crazy. Besides you promised."

"Okay. A live one it is. But it's your responsibility, not mine."

They rode the tram to the pet department, and finally selected a small male one.

"Would you like a bag?" the sales robot asked.

"No, thank you, I'll take it as it is," Debbie said, beaming.

"Remember to read the instructions carefully. They're fragile, you know."

"Yes, thank you!" Debbie and David left hand in hand. They had to take a Space Ways-U-Rent car home, as the skybus wouldn't allow small animals on board.

...

"It is important for your child to always be clean," Debbie read. She looked at Baby Spot. He came with a bottle of Nutri-Gurgle, guaranteed to make him healthy and happy . . . if it ever got inside. Putting it inside him seemed useless to Debbie. Spot liked it much better when he could smear it on his outside. He cooed and clapped. Debbie made a mental note to tell David when he got home that Spot did tricks.

She filled up the washbasin and placed Spot in it. The water came up to his tummy, and he occupied himself with smearing the water all over the counter.

"Maybe he's stuck," Debbie said aloud. A chiming noise in the back of the house warned her it was almost time for her favorite 3-D TV drama.

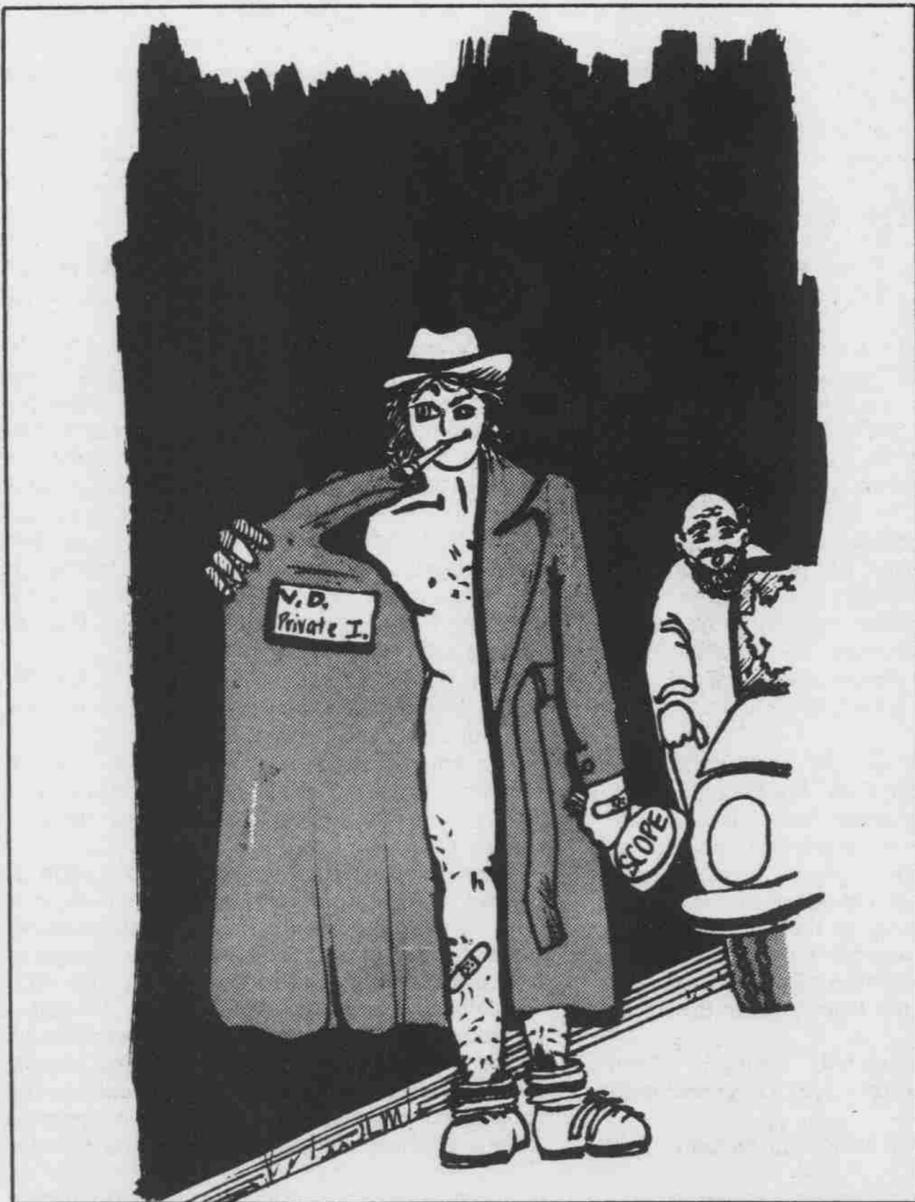
"Be good, Spot," she said as she left the room. The book had said it was a useful training phrase.

With Lorna safely in the arms of Dexter, her rescuer, Debbie sighed. So realistic, she thought. Oh, I forgot Spot. He's been cleaning long enough. I'd better fetch him and see what to do next.

She entered the bathroom and saw Spot was leaning forward and was very still. Good, he's not stuck, she thought. But I didn't know he was waterproof. She picked him up and dried off his still body. He must be asleep. She put him in bed and went back to the soap opera.

David came home at 5:00, as usual. Checking the room scan, he noticed Debbie standing in front of him. Tears were running down her face, and she held Spot out with both arms like a teddy bear that had lost an eye.

"I think he's broken," she said.



## Vic DANGER

By STEWART GRAY

I got out of bed, drank a few cups of Scope and made a B-line for the driveway. Once there, I spoke to my neighbor.

"Hi ya Pops."

"Don't call me Pops, you young asshole," he replied. Pops was a 73-year-old jockey with no hair.

I wrapped my wrist in leather and duct tape.

"Gonna put your hand through the windshield again Sonny?"

"Heck no, old timer," I replied as I thrust my fist through the driver's window of my rented car. "Uncle Sam's not getting any road taxes out of me, Grandpaw."

"Gall darn it, don't call me that, Vic. The name's Herman."

"Sure, Pops." I drove away chuckling to myself. The pieces of glass rubbing against my back pricked a sentimental vein, and I thought, "I sure am going to miss that old geezer when his brain is mold and his size 9's are pushing up daisies."

I kept chuckling until I thought of my last case, and then I started to laugh. "They'll be playing bingo in the Kremlin before I get bread for my babies out of that caper," I said to myself.

When I got to my office I called in my secretary Veronica to take dictation. The old girl didn't take three steps into my office before she fell flat on her face. "God doesn't smile on people who don't check for low strung limbo wires Veronica. Veronica?" but she didn't reply. I felt bad, not only was

she knocked unconscious, but she was also bleeding heavily on that nice rug I bought in Jersey City.

Vic Danger is a man of action, so I ran to the bathroom and brought back two handfuls of wet papertowels.

"Those ought to get the stain out, if anything does. How 'bout it Veronica?" But Veronica still didn't answer; she just kept lying there, growing pale.

"This is no good," I thought to myself. "I'm not paying anybody 5 percent of my gross just to bleed." So I quickly tore off my trousers and wrapped them around her headwound. Next I loosened her garments as best I could with my teeth and began massaging her torso to get the blood that was left back to her vital organs.

Just then the boss walked in.

"What the hell, Danger?"

"Take a powder Chief, I'm just trying to keep abreast of the situation."

"Well put those down and get your pants on, I've got some news that's likely to tan your gizzard."

"OK Chief, shoot. Give me the low-down. What's the bird's-eye view on this case? Pour the beans out, one at a time boss, who latered who? Truth be known, I'm nervous. I've got a bad feeling in my plumbing, it's whiskey I've never tasted."

"What in the name of gee-whiz are you talking about, Vic?"

"I'm not sure. All I know is that I keep hearing a little voice saying,

"danger Danger, danger."

Stewart Gray is a junior from Huntersville.