



TRUE TALES OF OF THE GREATEST LIES EVER TOLD!

# THE BIG BOOK OF HOAXES





# CHAPTER SIX

## PRANKSTERS AND SCAM ARTISTS

The difference between a prankster and a scam artist is a subtle one, but the effect it has on those on the receiving end is strikingly different. The prankster seeks to make his victim appear gullible, foolish, or just plain stupid, occasionally making a point about the subject of his hoax at the same time. Joey Skaggs, who starts off this section, is a master of this form of hoax — he considers his schemes not to be simple chicanery, but as performance art. In an earlier time, Hugh Troy had a similar approach — perpetrating elaborate hoaxes, often to expose the pretentiousness of the establishment's view of art.

The scam artist, on the other hand, seeks only monetary profit from his (or, in the case of the Queen of The Lonely Hearts, her) scheme, almost always at the expense of an unwitting victim. Unlike the prankster, the scam artist, while occasionally charismatic, is NOT a nice guy. Whether it's Ponzi, the grand old master of the pyramid scam, or George Parker, the man who profited greatly from the fraudulent (and habitual) sale of national buildings and monuments as diverse as Grant's Tomb and Madison Square Garden, or even quack New-Ager (and resident outer-space alien) Frederick Von Meirers, all the scam artists discussed here sought to first separate fools from their money — and by the time the fools realized it, be long, long gone.



WHAT DO A CANINE BROTHEL, A STRONG-ARM DIET PLAN, AND A VIRTUAL-REALITY SEX MACHINE HAVE IN COMMON? THEY'RE AMONG THE MANY MEDIA HOAXES DEVISED BY NEW YORK ARTIST...

# JOEY SKAGGS

# WANTED



-FOR-  
HOAXES, TRICKS,  
AND PRANKS

INSPIRED BY SURREALISM AND ABSURDISM, SKAGGS WAS A PERFORMANCE ARTIST IN THE 1960s. AN EARLY STUNT WAS CARRYING A LIFE-SIZE CRUCIFIX IN THE EASTER PARADE.



HE LED A BUSLOAD OF HIPPIE 'TOURISTS' ON AN EXCURSION TO SUBURBAN QUEENS.

--AND HERE YOU SEE A FINE EXAMPLE OF MIDDLE-AMERICAN CULTURE.

FAR OUT!

CHANGE



A VALENTINE'S DAY SCULPTURE COMMENTED ON SEXUAL FIXATION.

I'M TELLIN' YA, THERE'S A 50-FOOT BRA ON THE TREASURY BUILDING!



SKAGGS MADE THE NEWS, BUT HIS MESSAGE WAS TWISTED AND MISINTERPRETED.

--ANOTHER UN-AMERICAN BEATNIK PROTEST--



YOU MISSED THE POINT! IT'S ART!

SKAGGS SET OUT TO KIDULATE BOTH THE MEDIA'S FAÇADE OF INFALLIBILITY AND THE PUBLIC'S BLIND ACCEPTANCE OF IT.

I'LL USE THE MEDIA AS MY MEDIUM!



FOR HIS FIRST EFFORT, SKAGGS RAN AN AD ANNOUNCING A CATHOUSE FOR DOGS.

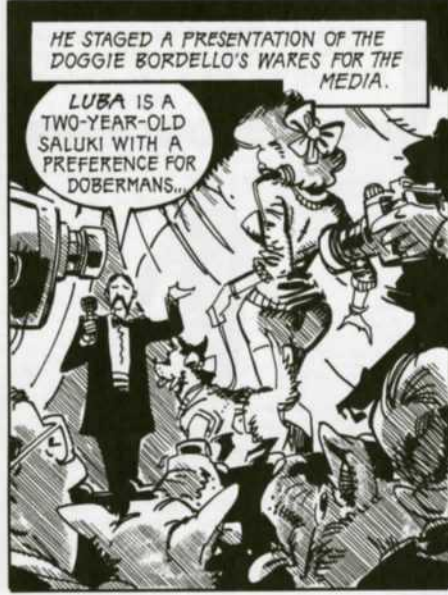
--FEATURING A SAVORY SELECTION OF HOT BITCHES." ZOWIE!

"NO WEIRDOS, PLEASE."



HE STAGED A PRESENTATION OF THE DOGGIE BORDELLO'S WARES FOR THE MEDIA.

LUBA IS A TWO-YEAR-OLD SALUKI WITH A PREFERENCE FOR DOBERMANS...







THE PRESS REPORTED SKAGGS'S FICTIONAL CANINE BROTHEL AS FACT, AND A PUBLIC OUTCRY FOLLOWED.

THIS IS THE ASPCA--

--VICE SQUAD--

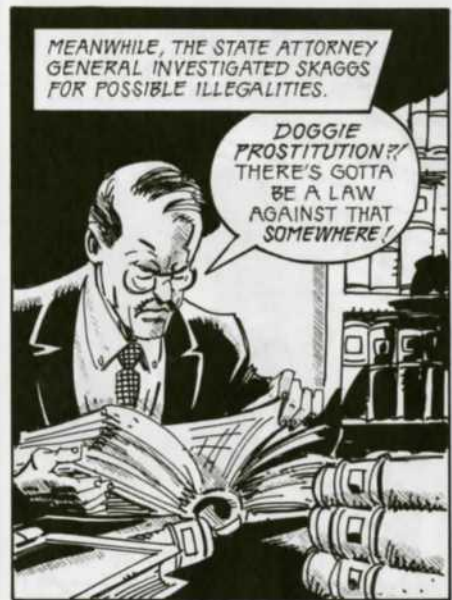
--BUREAU OF ANIMAL AFFAIRS--



ABC NEWS DID A REPORT ON THE CATHOUSE, INCLUDING AN INTERVIEW WITH SKAGGS.

I PLAN TO SELL FRANCHISES. MY SLOGAN IS "GET A LITTLE TAIL FOR YOUR DOG."

THE REPORT WAS NOMINATED FOR AN EMMY



MEANWHILE, THE STATE ATTORNEY GENERAL INVESTIGATED SKAGGS FOR POSSIBLE ILLEGALITIES.

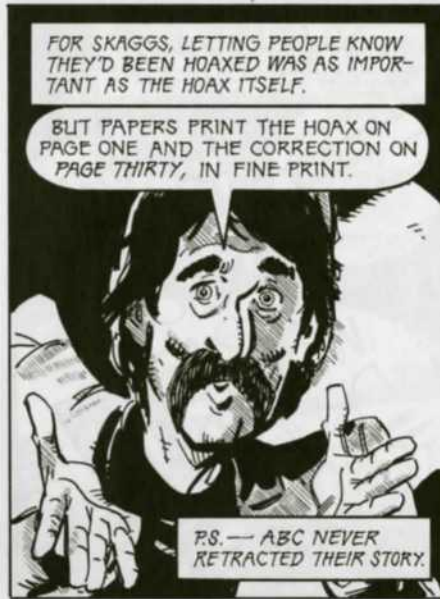
DOGGIE PROSTITUTION?! THERE'S GOTTA BE A LAW AGAINST THAT SOMEWHERE!



UNDER OATH, SKAGGS REVEALED THAT THE WHOLE THING WAS A PERFORMANCE.

THESE ARE ALL ACTORS.

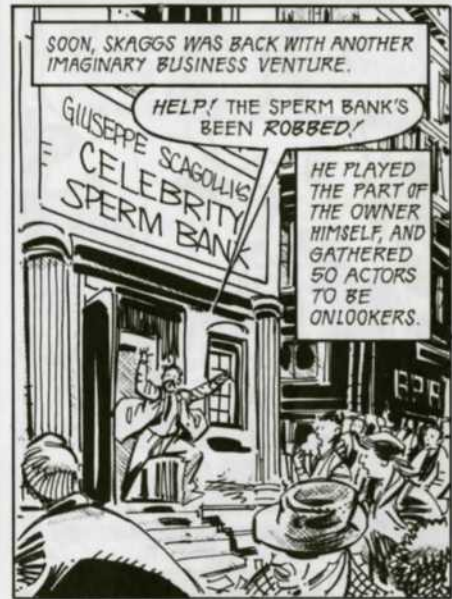
AAARGHH!



FOR SKAGGS, LETTING PEOPLE KNOW THEY'D BEEN HOAXED WAS AS IMPORTANT AS THE HOAX ITSELF.

BUT PAPERS PRINT THE HOAX ON PAGE ONE AND THE CORRECTION ON PAGE THIRTY, IN FINE PRINT.

P.S. — ABC NEVER RETRACTED THEIR STORY.



SOON, SKAGGS WAS BACK WITH ANOTHER IMAGINARY BUSINESS VENTURE.

HELP! THE SPERM BANK'S BEEN ROBBED!

HE PLAYED THE PART OF THE OWNER HIMSELF, AND GATHERED 50 ACTORS TO BE ONLOOKERS.



THE COMMOTION SOON DREW A BIGGER CROWD, ALONG WITH THE POLICE AND THE PRESS.

--BOB DYLAN WILL BE DONATING AGAIN NEXT WEDNESDAY, AND MICK SAID HE'D COME BACK--



--DON'T KNOW IF THIS IS A FEDERAL KIDNAPPING CASE YET — WE DON'T KNOW WHEN LIFE BEGINS--

THE STORY MADE NATIONAL NEWS AND GLORIA STEINEM RAN IT IN MS. MAGAZINE.



SKAGGS CALLED HER PERSONALLY TO TELL HER IT WAS A HOAX

OH! WELL, NEXT TIME YOU'RE DOING ANOTHER THING, LET ME KNOW!



FOR ANOTHER PROJECT, SKAGGS DUBBED HIMSELF DR. JOSEPH GREGOR, COLOMBIAN ENTOMOLOGIST



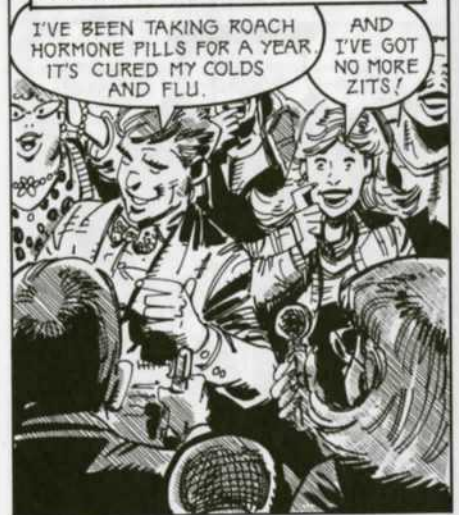
MANKIND IS KILLING ITSELF. THE COCKROACH IS OUR SALVATION.

SKAGGS SPENT \$3000 TO EQUIP AN AUTHENTIC-LOOKING LAB, WHERE HE HELD A PRESS CONFERENCE.



I HAVE BRED "SLUPER ROACHES," IMMUNE TO TOXINS— AND EXTRACTED THEIR HORMONES TO MAKE A VITAMIN

ACTORS PLAYING PATIENTS TOUTED GREGOR'S "MIRACLE DRUG."



I'VE BEEN TAKING ROACH HORMONE PILLS FOR A YEAR. IT'S CURED MY COLDS AND FLU.

AND I'VE GOT NO MORE ZITS!

VERY INTERESTING, DR. GREGOR.

I'LL WRITE UP YOU AND YOUR ORGANIZATION, METAMORPHOSIS.



REPORTERS MISSED SKAGGS'S ALLUSIONS TO KAFKA'S "METAMORPHOSIS" IN WHICH GREGOR SAMSA BECOMES A GIANT INSECT

THE STORY WAS PICKED UP BY UPI AND RAN IN PAPERS AROUND THE COUNTRY.



IT WAS MONTHS BEFORE UPI PRINTED A HALF-HEARTED RETRACTION.

ANOTHER HOAX BEGAN AS A SCHEME TO HELP A FRIEND GET AN ACTING JOB.



I'LL PRETEND TO BE YOUR AGENT. YOU LOOK TOUGH— I'LL CALL MY AGENCY "BAD GUYS, INC."

MY BOY DON'T NEED TO AUDITION, SEE!

GRRRRR!

FABULOUS! HE'S HIRED!



THE DECEPTION WORKED SO WELL THAT SKAGGS FOUND HIMSELF FORCED TO ACTUALLY BECOME AN AGENT.

"FISH CONDOS," HIS SATIRE ON YUPPIES, GOT HIM IN LIFE MAGAZINE AND ON "GOOD MORNING AMERICA."

THEY'RE AQUARIUMS FOR UPWARDLY MOBILE GUPPIES.

AMAZING!







USING THE NAMES "JOE BONES," SKAGGS LAUNCHED AN IMAGINARY WEIGHT-LOSS PLAN.

THE FAT SQUAD WILL ENFORCE YOUR DIET!

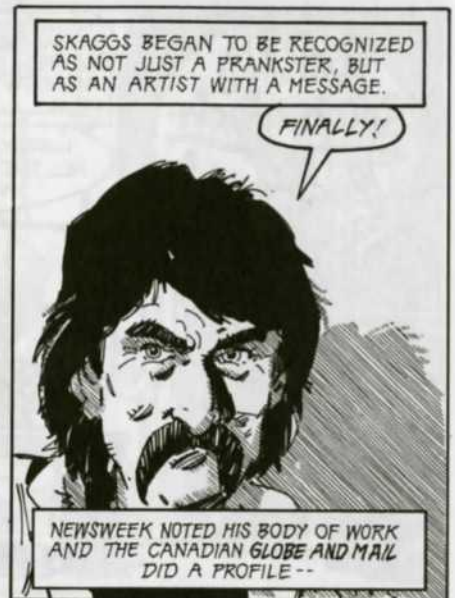
"GOOD MORNING AMERICA" CALLED AGAIN.



FOR \$300 A DAY, A COMMANDO IS WITH YOU AROUND THE CLOCK, WATCHING WHAT YOU EAT

MARVELOUS!

WHERE HAVE I SEEN THIS GUY BEFORE?



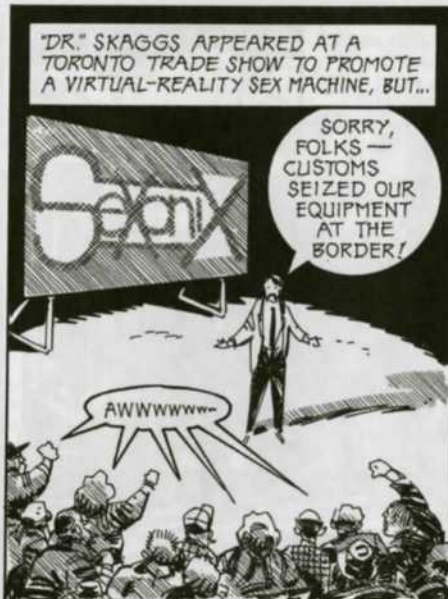
SKAGGS BEGAN TO BE RECOGNIZED AS NOT JUST A PRANKSTER, BUT AS AN ARTIST WITH A MESSAGE.

FINALLY!

NEWSWEEK NOTED HIS BODY OF WORK AND THE CANADIAN GLOBE AND MAIL DID A PROFILE --



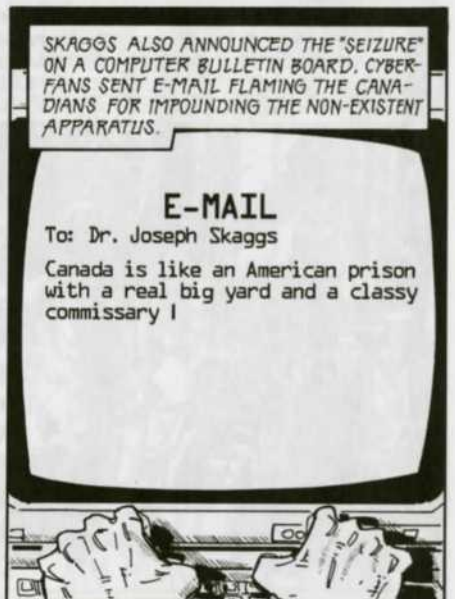
-- ONLY TO BE TAKEN IN BY ANOTHER OF SKAGGS'S EFFORTS A YEAR LATER. A PHOTO OF "FATHER JOSEPH" AND HIS TRAVELING CONFESSION BOOTH MADE THE FRONT PAGE.



"DR." SKAGGS APPEARED AT A TORONTO TRADE SHOW TO PROMOTE A VIRTUAL-REALITY SEX MACHINE, BUT...

SORRY, FOLKS — CUSTOMS SEIZED OUR EQUIPMENT AT THE BORDER!

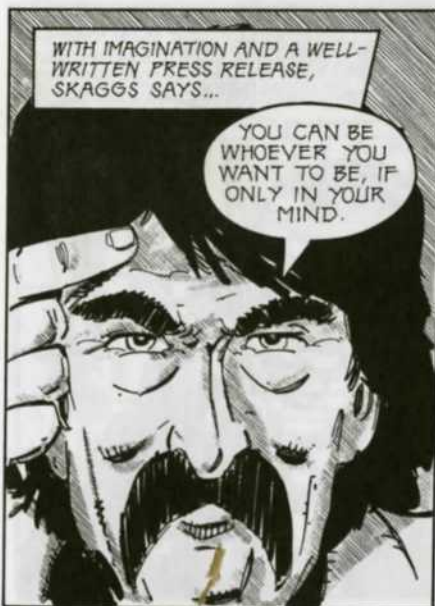
AWWWWWWWW...



SKAGGS ALSO ANNOUNCED THE "SEIZURE" ON A COMPUTER BULLETIN BOARD. CYBERFANS SENT E-MAIL FLAMING THE CANADIANS FOR IMPOUNDING THE NON-EXISTENT APPARATUS.

**E-MAIL**

To: Dr. Joseph Skaggs  
Canada is like an American prison with a real big yard and a classy commissary!



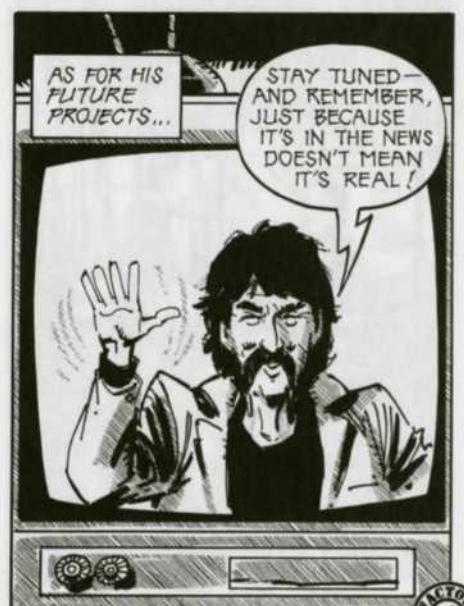
WITH IMAGINATION AND A WELL-WRITTEN PRESS RELEASE, SKAGGS SAYS...

YOU CAN BE WHOEVER YOU WANT TO BE, IF ONLY IN YOUR MIND.



AND, THANKS TO THE MEDIA--

--IT BECOMES REALITY IN THE MIND OF EVERYONE ELSE, TOO!



AS FOR HIS FUTURE PROJECTS...

STAY TUNED— AND REMEMBER, JUST BECAUSE IT'S IN THE NEWS DOESN'T MEAN IT'S REAL!

