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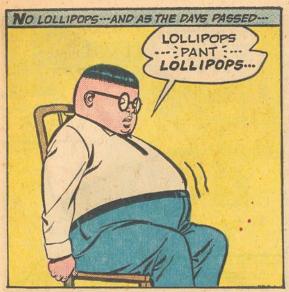


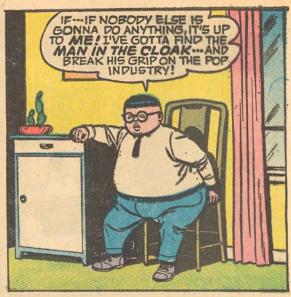










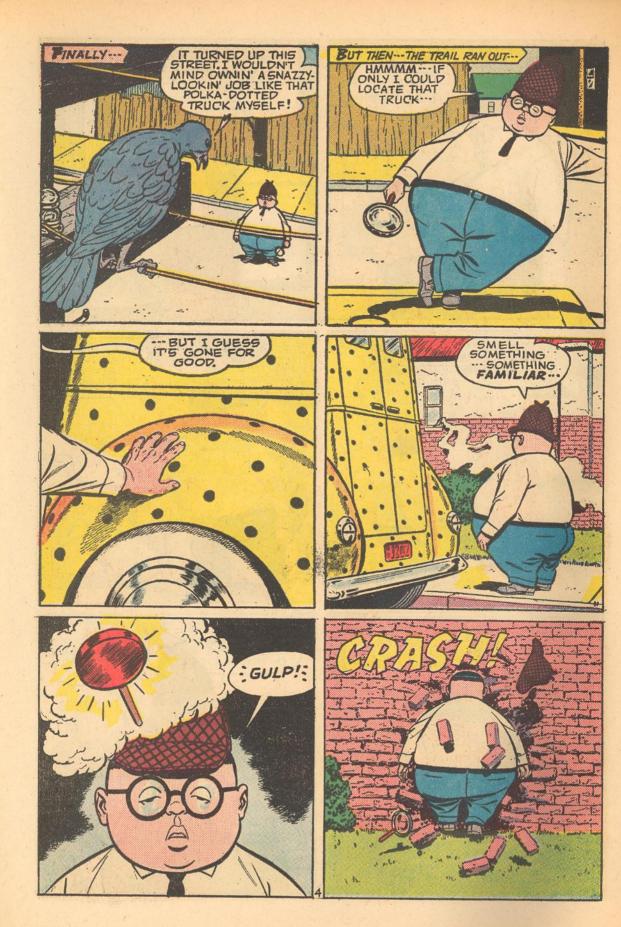


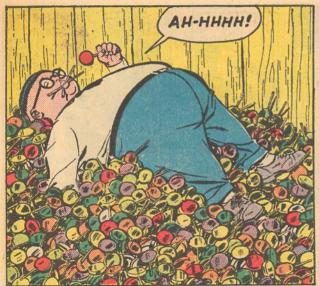


































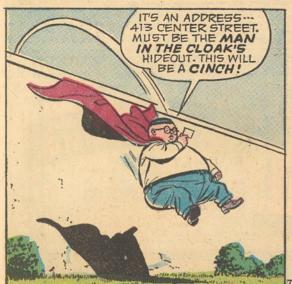
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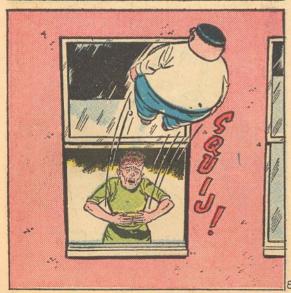
























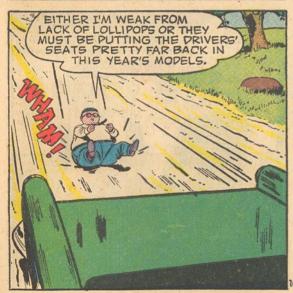






































## LOLLIPOP ASTRONAUT

Mr. Popnecker looked up from his newspaper with a gasp. "This space expedition to the Planet Fink", he gasped. "You know who's been appointed to head it? General Merton Boop, my uncle's friend, that's who! That gives me the chance I've been waiting for, mom. Herbie, that Little Fat Nothing of ours—he could be something if he got to go along on an expedition like that. Why, he'd see history being made! And General Merton Boop wouldn't refuse me—I'm sure of it."

The General didn't refuse. "Har-rumph!" he said. "Might be able to use a boy at that, Hope he appreciates the honor, by George. Har-rumph!" And he proceeded with his work of organizing the expedition. Under him came three dignified colonels, four self-important lieutenant-colonels and five stiffnecked majors. And under all of them came-Herbie. "Har-rumph!" said the General. "Don't you dare suck that lollipop in my presence!" The colonels glared at Herbie and told him to pull his stomach in, which would have required a magician. The lieutenant-colonels ordered him always to stand in their presence. As for the majors, they growled whenever they saw him and set him to work at any and every job they could think of.

Dad and mom took a tearful leave of Herbie just before blastoff. "There isn't much you'll be able to do on a trip like this," said dad. "Just remember what an honor it is!" And Herbie remembered....but he soon found out something disturbing. General, colonels, lieutenant-colonels, majors. They were the officers—but how about the crew? That was Herbie. Cook the food—Herbie. Serve the food—Herbie. Wash the dishes, clean the ship—Herbie. And "Grease those engines, you hear, Herbie?"

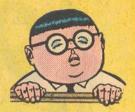
He couldn't have stood it if he hadn't had

the forethought to lay in an ample stock of lollipops. So there wasn't much for him to do on a trip like this, huh? What with the commands from every officer, he found that he was working a 24-hour day. It was exhausting-so much so that he gained twelve pounds. One thing he could be thankful forit was a peaceful, uneventful trip as they darted through space towards the Planet Fink. Peaceful and uneventful, that is, until the day when they sighted a huge comet plunging straight for them. And no matter how much the rocket changed course, there was no shaking off the grim pursuer, which closed in relentlessly. There was only one way in which it could end-collision and extinction for everyone aboard. So the general, the colonels, the lieutenant-colonels and the majors gathered in a group and howled. "Get no place that way", thought Herbie. So he opened an escape hatch and walked out of the rocket. Through space he trudged, right up to the comet, which headed for him fiercely. "Out of my way, Popnecker!" it growled, but you don't mess around with Herbie. There was only one thing to do, and that was to bop it with his lollipop. He never wasted words when it came to lollipop-bopping, and the comet blew to pieces with a mighty roar. Back to the rocket plodded Herbie. He entered to find that he hadn't even been missed. General, colonels, lieutenant-colonels and majors were arguing about who should get the credit for destroying the comet-and they were still arguing when the fuel ran out. "Never get to Planet Fink this way," Herbie muttered to himself. Once again he headed out through an escape hatch, got behind the rocket and started pushing. It got to be a little tiring after the first few million miles, particularly when the time came to land the big craft on the target planet. He had to grab it by the nose









and set it down gently on its tail. Then all the high muck-a-mucks aboard poured out, debating as to just who among them should get the credit for the successful landing. "Got 'em here," thought Herbie.." Can relax now."

Wrong. A Popnecker can never relax. Towards them, over the surface of the Planet Fink, crawled the grand-daddy of all serpents. It was roughly five miles long, weighed a trifle under a million tons ringside and craved an appetizer made up of a general, colonels, lieutenant-colonels and majors. Howling in fear, they headed back into the rocket on the run, leaving Herbie to face the oncoming menace. "Back!" said Herbie. "Your fodder's moustache", hissed the huge reptile. "Hold my lollipop", said Herbie. And when the top brass at length ventured timidly out of their hideout, there was that king-sized serpent neatly tied up in the best Boy Scout knots that Herbie Popnecker could remember. "Abem!" said the General. "Obviously it must have sighted the stars on my shoulders and was so frightened that it tied itself in knots!" The colonels thought it was their eagles that were responsible, while the lieutenantcolonels and majors were inclined to ascribe the credit to their oak leaves. But they didn't have too much time to argue about it. It happened while Herbie was out gathering food for the expedition-a large group of two-headed Spacemen attacked and captured every last officer. Herbie saw it happen from a distance and drew a despairing breath. Really, this was almost too much-was he never to get a chance to relax? But "Americans", said Herbie. "Gotta save 'em''.

So right into the King's palace he strode. "Got some of my people here," he said. "Let 'em go."

"Just because you're Herbie Popnecker?" asked the King scornfully, speaking through his left head. "Like he says", barked his right head. "What can you do, anyway?"

"Bop you with this here lollipop," said

Herbie menacingly. Both heads turned white and before you knew it, every one of the officers was released and presented with an apology and his weight in gold. And each of them had his own opinion as to who should receive the credit for it all. "Better get 'em back to Earth before they start fighting about it", thought Herbie. Before he could do this, however, he had to get the rocket fuel for the return trip. There just wasn't any on the Planet Fink, so Herbie ended up making it himself. He had to mix a batch of cough syrup, raw onions, hen's teeth, after-shaving lotion and powdered chowder, but the resultant solution lacked oomph. Stirring it with a special High Octane Lollipop finally did the job. The rocket blasted off with the roar of a thousand earthquakes and back through space it darted.

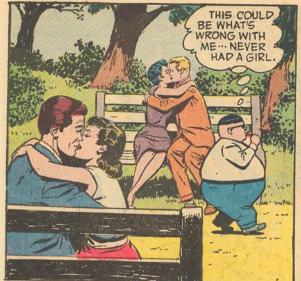
You can just about imagine the furore when the expedition returned to Earth. There were parades, banquets, wild celebrations. Congress voted medals to the General, the colonels, the lieutenantcolonels and the majors. Matter of fact, the only one who didn't get a medal was Herbie, because after all, what had be done? His father was so ashamed that he couldn't look anyone in the face. "I must have been crazy to ever hope that be'd do anything!" he muttered.

As for Herbie, he was frankly and fatly tired. And why not, when he hadn't had time to sleep for a single second during the eight months the expedition had lasted? He had eyes for only one thing when he returned home-a new hammock that had been slung between the house and the big oak tree that stood alongside it. He collapsed into it and a majestic snore rent the air. ascending towards the Outer Space from which he had so recently returned.

Shuddering, Mr. Popnecker clapped his hands over his suffering ears and turned away his suffering eyes. "Why don't I give up trying?" he asked. "I might as well resign myself. He's a Little Fat Nothing-and

that's all he'll ever be!"

















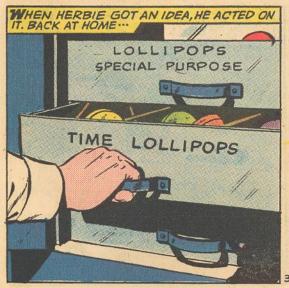




















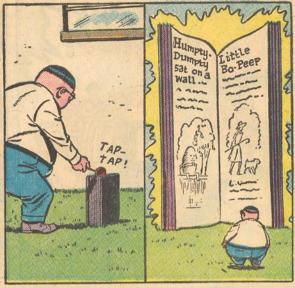


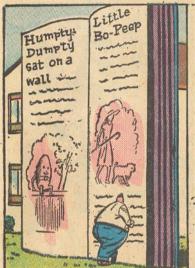












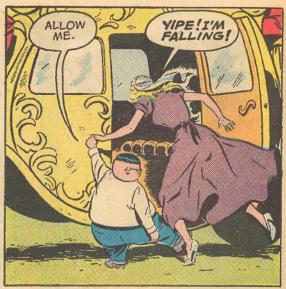


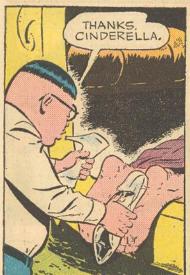








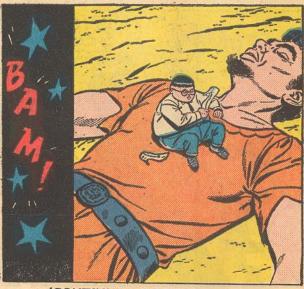












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