



And no wonder, when the leathermen's look is grounded in the drawings of Tom of Finland. This was proven to me the day after the fair, when I cracked open a boxed set of books that's a super treat.

The Tom of Finland Comic Collection (Taschen, \$39.99) gathers in five 4x6-inch volumes

all the multi-page story-comics that Tom drew over several decades. Most prominently, this is all 26 editions of the *Kake* comics, in chronological order. All of Tom's other comic stories are included, too. Two *Beach Boys* deliver Speedo-stretching cock tease, three *Jack of the Jungle* adventures feature a Tarzan clone who swings on natives as well as vines, and one *Ringo and the Renegades* depicts the ravishment of a horny rock star. There are also all six of the briefer *Mike* comics, and an early unpublished storybook. All

of this is garnished with photo montages of Tom's life and artistic inspirations. In short, the publishers really mean "Complete." It's a cock comic cornucopia.

Touko Laaksonen didn't become Tom of Finland for nearly four decades after he was born, in 1920, in the small Finnish village of Kaarina (finding a namesake town makes me wonder, I who have been known as Karrlotta, Karrmencita, and most tellingly, Karrina, if I am not really Kaarina, Princess of Finland). After years of drawing only for himself and a close circle of friends, Tom submitted some work to Bob Mizer, who, in the Spring 1957 issue of *Physique Pictorial*, published him and gave him a new name.

Prolific and popular, Tom was soon appearing in each issue, and created his first story panels in late 1961. Next up would be an ongoing character. The Ultimate Tom's Man was to be a blond named Vicky. That's a common man's name in Finland, but it wouldn't have washed here, so the character became Mike. And then, finally, Kake. The Finnish equivalent of "Butch." It's pronounced kah-Kay, or, more simply, cocky. Well, in Gay English, that would be spelled cocke, with an accent grave over the final letter. But we have to forego such niceties at the moment, since the BAR's new online edition [www.ebar.com] currently turns diacriticals (those chicken

scratchings that denote phonetic value) into dingbats, and that'll never do. Gay English, do I need explain, employs lots of unnecessary Capital Letters, multitudes of exclamation points, and *tres, tres* Frenchified words. It's sort of a queer ebonics, and it makes the Editor blanch. That's not what I call him; it's his color upon reading this.

Debuting in 1968, Kake was

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the prototypical *Wild One* sort of leather biker. Wherever he ventured, into service stations, t-rooms, tattoo parlors, cruising and construction sites, randy offices, and other such locales, he serendipitously encountered a panoply of happy pricks on businessman, biker, athlete, preppie, sailor, and cop. Especially cop. The *Kake* comics read like a sex manual, one which a generation of leathermen has been streamlining and hyping. The look is celebrated at beauty pageants, where the expectations of a leatherman's sexuality become writ with the enactment of fantasies.

Tom's fantasies resulted in comic books. The fantasies of today's leatherman result in plans. Yet judging from today's porno, there's a key element that seems to be missing from the leatherman's reconstruction of Tom's tales. Their joy. The variety and intensity of the encounters depicted, as well as the simple clarity of Tom's draughtsmanship, are much renowned. The extreme yet curiously believable exaggerations of body parts are celebrated (because, wrote one critic, "the physiques



Image courtesy Taschen

Tom's men enjoy themselves thoroughly, here in one volume's endpaper.

aren't so much distorted as augmented.") But most remarkable upon a fresh acquaintance with the comics is their good humor. Tom's men enjoy themselves thoroughly. They are affectionate; they do not have impenetrable facades. The drawings have been called unapologetic, but that politicizes them unduly. They're neither angry nor defiant. I'd say they're confident. Tom's men are secure enough in their sexuality to implement the force of men with the playfulness of boys. I never see this

happiness in porno, where the leatherman's lot is a hard and stern attitude. I hope it's different in the dungeons, playrooms and bedrooms of real life.

Sure, I wish the books were a little bigger. A coupla more inches never hurt. But the volumes of this little box are like a breviary. Keep it by your bedside and read a bit each night. Did I say read? I meant absorb. No — engorge yourself with it. Isn't it wonderful how art can relieve the day's tension? ▼