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CREEPY

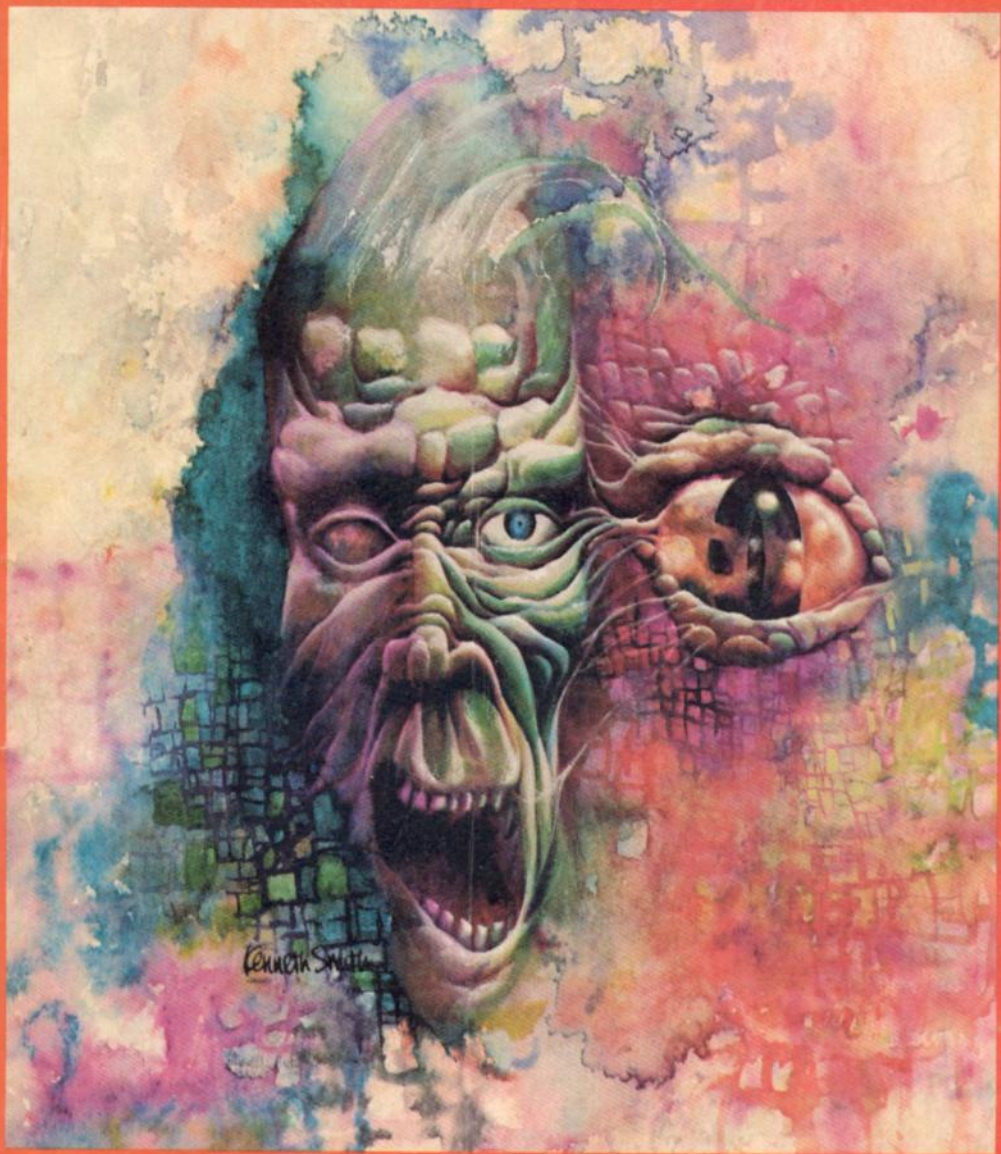
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HE GREW SILENT, KNOWING IT WAS USELESS TO ARGUE. HE KISSED HER, REALIZING THAT THIS MIGHT WELL BE THEIR LAST KISS...



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COME WITH ME
TO LEGEND-
SHROUDED
SCOTLAND,
FEAR FANCIERS
...YOU'LL FIND
MANY
THINGS OF
INTEREST
THERE,
MOST
PARTICU-
LARLY...

THE TWING IN LOCH NESS

THE EVENING AIR LEANED HEAVILY ON THE WEEDS AND GRASSES LINING OILY WATER OF THE LOCH, SENDING A MOMENTARY CHILL UP THE NAKED BACK OF JERALD SHAW. WITH A GRUNT OF RELIEF HE SWUNG THE HEAVY METAL COMPRESSED AIR TANK FROM BRONZED SHOULDERS AND LET IT LAND WITH A DULL THUD ON THE MUDDY BANK BESIDE HIM. ACROSS THE RIPPLING CHANNEL A CHORUS OF BULL FROGS BELLOWED THEIR MATING CALL AT THE GATHERING STARS, SLICING THE ALMOST PERFECT SILENCE. JERALD SHIFTED HIS WEIGHT ON THE MOSSY SHORE AND GRASPED ONE END OF THE SILVER-GREY TANK, ADJUSTING THE REGULATOR AND AIR HOSE, CHECKING THE PRESSURE GAUGE AND BREATHING LINE. HE UNTIED THE FLIPPERS AND MASK FROM HIS WEIGHT BELT, DROPPED THE FLIPPERS TO THE GROUND AND STEPPED INTO THE SOFT RUBBER LINING. HE PULLED THE LONG UNDER-WATER FLASHLIGHT FROM HIS BELT AND SENT A THIN WHITE SHAFT INTO THE WEEDS, TESTING IT. SATISFIED, HE FITTED ON THE DIVING MASK...

TIME TO GET
RID OF YOU,
NESSIE!



BRUCE JONES

JERALD SHAW TRUDGED AWKWARDLY DOWN THE BANK AND INTO THE COLD WATERS OF LOCH NESS, GOOSEFLESH SPREADING GREEDILY OVER ANKLES AND CALVES, ACROSS THIGHS AND KNEES...

THIS IS FOR
US, GWEN,
YOU AND
ME...



WHEN HE WAS WAIST DEEP, HE PAUSED ON THE OOZING BOTTOM, PULLED THE GLASS PLATED MASK OVER HIS FACE, BIT INTO THE AIR HOSE, AND FELL FORWARD INTO THE BLACK WATER...



ONE LAST DIVE,
THEN WE'LL
HAVE ALL WE
NEED...

JERALD KICKED HARD WITH THE SWIM FINS, SHOOTING BENEATH THE SURFACE... DOWN, DOWN UNTIL THE BOTTOM FELL AWAY AND THE LOCH BECAME AN ENDLESS ABYSS. HE SWITCHED ON THE UNDERWATER FLASHLIGHT AND WATCHED IT KNIFE INTO THE INKY, LIQUID WORLD AHEAD OF HIM. IT WAS LIKE FALLING INTO A NIGHTMARE OF FREEZING BLACKNESS, BUT HE PUSHED HIMSELF AHEAD WITH DETERMINATION; THIS WAS THE LAST TIME, HE HAD TO GET IT DONE.



GWEN, BEAUTIFUL, DESIRABLE GWEN. SHE WAS HIS NOW, ALL HIS, AND AFTER TONIGHT THEY COULD GO AWAY TO AMERICA AND FORGET COMPLETELY THIS MISERABLE PLACE. GWEN... IT SEEMED ONLY YESTERDAY THEY'D MET... JERALD SANK DEEPER, REMEMBERING...



ACTUALLY, IT HAD BEEN TWO WEEKS SINCE HE'D MET HER THERE IN MACLAIRD'S TAVERN, SERVING BEER AND ALE TO THE TOWN LOCALS. JERALD WAS ALONE THAT NIGHT, AS USUAL, DROWNING HIS BOREDOM IN AN AFTER-WORK STEIN. GWEN HAD APPEARED OUT OF NOWHERE...



SHE WAS COLD AT FIRST, UNIMPRESSED WITH TYPICAL BAR ROOM TECHNIQUE... SHE HAD CLASS. BUT HE DIDN'T LET THAT STOP HIM, HE KNEW THE LOOK OF BOREDOM IN A PERSON'S EYES, HAVING SEEN IT OFTEN ENOUGH IN THE MIRROR. HE KNEW WHEN A GIRL WAS RESTLESS AND EAGER FOR SOMETHING MORE IN LIFE...



JERALD GAZED ACROSS THE ROOM TO THE FIGURE OF THE BENT OLD MAN GLOATING AT THEM FROM BEHIND THE COUNTER...



SHE WAS A CHALLENGE, AND HE LIKED THAT. HE WAS SICK OF PUSHOVERS. SOONER OR LATER SHE'D COME AROUND, THEY ALL DID. IT WAS JUST A QUESTION OF TIME AND PATIENCE...

THERE'S A FULL MOON OUT TONIGHT, HAVE YOU NOTICED? WHEN ARE YOU GOING TO LEAVE GRANDPA TO HIS STAMP COLLECTION AND LET ME SHOW YOU WHAT LIFE IS ALL ABOUT?

YOU'RE CRAZY, ARE ALL YOU YANKS SO NERVY? WHAT MAKES YOU THINK I'D GO OUT WITH YOU. EVEN IF I WANTED TO, IT WOULD BE IMPOSSIBLE...

NOW THAT'S WHERE YOU'RE WRONG, I'VE GOT IT ALL WORKED OUT. NEXT TIME YOU TWO LEAVE FOR WORK, PRETEND YOU DON'T FEEL WELL... A HEADACHE, ANY EXCUSE TO STAY HOME. I'LL WAIT OUTSIDE THE TAVERN IN MY CAR BEFORE HE OPENS UP. WHEN I SEE THE OLD MAN COMING DOWN THE ROAD ALONE THAT WILL BE MY SIGNAL TO MEET YOU AT YOUR PLACE.

SIMPLE. HOW ABOUT TOMORROW NIGHT?

SHE'D SAID NO, CALLED HIM INSANE, BUT THERE WAS THAT LOOK IN HER EYES, THAT SECRET YEARNING BELYING HER COOL FACADE AND TELLING HIM YES, SURE ENOUGH, THE OLD MAN CAME ALONE THE NEXT NIGHT AND IT WAS ONLY A MATTER OF MINUTES BEFORE JERALD WAS IN HER ARMS.

AFTER THAT THEY MET AT EVERY GIVEN CHANCE, IN OUT OF THE WAY CAFES, ON DESERTED ROADS, ANYWHERE THEY COULD SHARE A FEW STOLEN MOMENTS, AND SOON THE STOLEN MOMENTS WEREN'T ENOUGH...

I LOVE YOU, GWEN, I WANT YOU WITH ME ALWAYS. I WANT TO TAKE YOU TO AMERICA, AS MY WIFE.

OH JERRY, YOU KNOW HOW I FEEL, BUT HE'D NEVER GRANT ME A DIVORCE, NEVER! I'M ALL HE HAS IN LIFE...

THEN WE'LL HAVE TO FIND ANOTHER WAY...

OH DARLING, I'M FRIGHTENED! HOLD ME TIGHT!

THIS IS WRONG... I KNOW IT IS... BUT I COULDN'T STAND IT ANY LONGER...

BABY...

JOHN MACLAIRD WAS ALONE ON THE ROAD THE NEXT NIGHT. HIS BENT FIGURE ILLUMINATED IN JERALD'S HEADLIGHTS.

THERE HE IS! GOODBYE YOU OLD CREEP! YOU'VE LIVED TOO LONG, ALREADY!

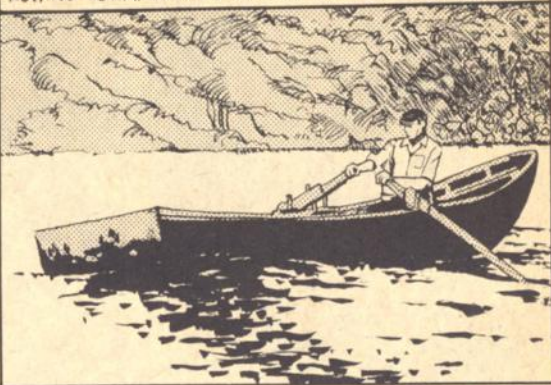
HE SAW THE OLD MAN TURN AS THE VEHICLE BORE DOWN ON HIM, SAW THE LOOK OF SHOCK AND FEAR ON HIS FACE JUST BEFORE THE FRONT BUMPER PLOWED INTO HIS FLAILING FORM AND THE TIRES GROUND HIM INTO THE HARD DIRT.

JERALD STOPPED THE CAR AND RAN BACK. HE LIFTED THE BROKEN CARCASS TO THE TRUNK AND DUMPED IT IN...



TIRE TRACKS ON HIS SHIRT... HIS FACE... BLAST! HE'LL NEVER PASS FOR A DROWNED MAN NOW. I'LL HAVE TO DISPOSE OF THE BODY... MAKE IT SEEM AS THOUGH HE SANK AND WAS LOST IN THE LOCH.

HE DROVE TO THE BACK OF LAFERTY'S TAVERN AND PARKED THE CAR, WAITING SEVERAL MINUTES TO BE SURE NO ONE WAS PROWLING ABOUT, THEN DRAGGED THE STIFFENING BODY DOWN TO THE SHORE AND DUMPED IT INTO LAFERTY'S OWN FISHING BOAT. HE BEGAN ROWING TOWARD THE DEEPEST PART OF THE LOCH.



JERALD LET GO THE OARS AT LAST, PLACED THE HEAVY IRON ANCHOR OVER LAFERTY'S RIGID FORM, AND BEGAN LASHING THE TWO TOGETHER WITH STRONG MOORING LINE. HE SAT BACK, RAN A SHAKING HAND ACROSS HIS BROW, THEN GROANING, HEAVED THE BODY AND ANCHOR OVER THE GUNWHALE.



NOW WE CAN BE ALONE, GWEN.

THE NEXT FEW WEEKS WERE HECTIC... THE QUESTIONING BY THE POLICE, THE INVESTIGATION... BUT GWEN PLAYED THE BROKEN HEARTED WIDOW TO A TEE. HE WAS OLD, SHE WARNED HIM NOT TO GO OUT ALONE. IT HAD FINALLY HAPPENED THE POLICE NODDED. DEATH BY ACCIDENTAL DROWNING.



JERALD LET THINGS COOL OFF AWHILE, THEN BEGAN DATING HER IN THE OPEN. THEY PLANNED IT CAREFULLY, AVOIDING SUSPICION. THEN ONE EVENING SHE'D CONFESSED...



BROKE? YOU? BUT YOUR HUSBAND... HE MUST HAVE SALTED AWAY SOMETHING! WHAT ABOUT THE TAVERN?



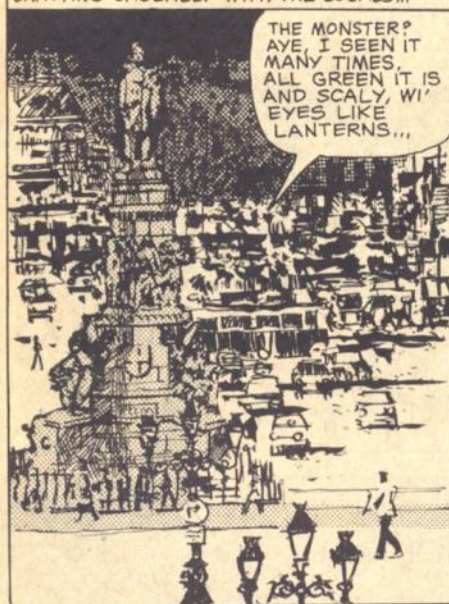
IT'S BEEN IN THE RED FOR YEARS. WE WERE BURIED UNDER A TON OF MORTGAGE. I'M SORRY DARLING. I'D HAVE TOLD YOU SOONER BUT I WAS AFRAID IF YOU KNEW...

DON'T BE SILLY, GWEN. I'D NEVER LEAVE YOU. I'LL FIGURE SOMETHING OUT, DON'T WORRY.

MONEY. HE NEVER HAD MUCH, NOW HE WAS DEEPER IN DEBT THAN EVER. UNLESS A MIRACLE HAPPENED THEY'D NEVER GET OUT FROM UNDER THE BILLS AND PAYMENTS... NEVER GET TO AMERICA...

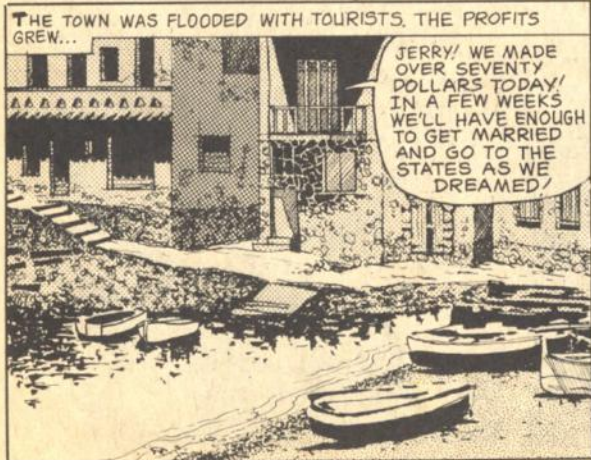


JERALD BEGAN TO MAKE THE ROUNDS, CHATTING CASUALLY WITH THE LOCALS...



THAT NIGHT AND MANY NIGHTS THEREAFTER, JERALD WORKED FAR INTO THE MORNING, MOLDING CLAY, POURING WAX...





JERALD GLANCED AT HIS DEPTH GAUGE; EIGHTY FEET. HE SHOULD BE ALMOST THERE NOW. IN ANOTHER FEW MINUTES HE WOULD SEE HIS CREATION, WITHDRAW HIS KNIFE, AND WATCH IT WITHER TO THE LOCH FLOOR AMID A FLOOD OF ESCAPING BUBBLES... ELIMINATING THE LAST TRACE OF EVIDENCE...



THE FLASHLIGHT BEAM ACROSS SOMETHING SWAYING IN THE WATER BENEATH HIM. HE STOPPED SHORT, TREADING THE WATER IN HORROR, THE GRISLY HEAD AND SHOULDERS SPOTLIGHTED BELOW, BECKONING HIM DOWNWARD IN A DANCE MACABRE...



THE ANCHOR HAD STRUCK UPRIGHT ON THE MUDDY BOTTOM, HELD FAST BY THE OOZE AND SLIME. LAFERTY'S BODY PICKED APART BY FISH AND CURRENTS, STOOD LIKE A GRIM SENTINEL GAZING FOREVER UPWARD WITH SIGHTLESS EYES.



WITH A SHIVER, JERALD KICKED PASSED THE MORBID SIGHT AND TRAINED HIS LIGHT ON THE SURROUNDING FLOOR. THERE WAS THE FAMILIAR ROCK FORMATION, THERE THE WEED PATCH... A DIM OUTLINE BEGAN TO TAKE SHAPE. HE'D FOUND IT.



HE SANK DOWN UPON THE SCALY PAINTED BACK AND REACHED FOR THE KNIFE AT HIS BELT, THE BLADE GLISTENING IN THE GLARE OF THE FLASHLIGHT. HE RAISED THE WEAPON HIGH, BROUGHT IT DOWN WITH ALL HIS STRENGTH, FELT IT BITE DEEP, WATCHED THE WATER CLOUD WITH A THICK STREAM OF...



JERALD FELL BACK IN AMAZEMENT. BENEATH HIM THE "PLASTIC" MONSTER BEGAN TO TREMBLE AND SHAKE. THEN THE LARGE DARK HEAD WITH THE GLISTENING FANGS RAISED ITSELF INTO FULL VIEW. JERALD SCREAMED INTO HIS MOUTH PLACE...



PANIC SENT HIS LEGS INTO GALVANIZED MOTION, CHURNING THE WATER WHITE IN A DESPERATE EFFORT TO ESCAPE THE PRIMITIVE HORROR LOOMING FROM THE FLOOR BESIDE HIM...



HE SWAM AS HE HAD NEVER SWUM BEFORE, ARMS AND LEGS ACHING, CHEST HEAVING WITH THE METALLIC TASTE OF COMPRESSED AIR. THEN SUDDENLY HE WASN'T MOVING AT ALL. SUDDENLY ALL HIS VIOLENT STRUGGLES WERE IN VAIN. HE LOOKED DOWN, EYES WIDENING IN TERROR...



BEFORE HE HAD TIME TO UNTANGLE THEM, BEFORE HE HAD TIME TO THINK AT ALL, JERALD WAS STARING INTO A CAVERN OF IVORY STUPPED DEATH; THE LAST THING HIS FEAR-MADDENED EYES WOULD EVER SEE... THE LOATHSOME JAW OF THE LOCH NESS MONSTER!



THE MUTILATED FACE OF JOHN LEFARTY GRINNED BACK AT HIM IDIOTICALLY. THE MOORING ROPE JERALD HAD LASHED THE BODY WITH NOW HOPELESSLY ENSNARED HIS ANKLES AND CALVES.



LET THAT BE A LESSON, MODEL BUILDERS! DON'T MAKE YOUR REPLICA TOO REALISTIC... YOU MIGHT MISTAKE IT FOR THE ORIGINAL, JUST LIKE JERALD DID!



COME ON, SKIPPER,
DO A GOMERSAULT
FOR SHEILA AND
I'LL GIVE YOU A
BANANA -
COME ON!

SHEILA,
I'VE ASKED
YOU SO MANY
TIMES - PLEASE
DON'T PLAY WITH
SKIPPER....

MARK,
YOU
ALWAYS
REFER TO
SKIPPER AS
A BEAST OR "IT"

IT'S TRAINING
IS VERY SPECIFIC AND YOU'RE
INTERFERING WITH IT!
A LOT DEPENDS ON
THIS BEAST AND
YOU'RE NOT
HELPING!
OH, MARK -

I CAN'T AFFORD THE LUXURY OF
PERSONALIZING IT. ER-SKIPPER.
IT'S A BEAST, TRAINED TO DO
A LIMITED, BUT IMPORTANT
FUNCTION ABOARD JUPITER II!

SOMETIMES...I JUST
DON'T FEEL I
UNDERSTAND YOU, MARK -

PLEASE DON'T START THAT
AGAIN, DARLING - I DON'T MIND
YOUR ROMANTICIZING MY WORK, BUT
YOU MUSTN'T EXPECT ME TO!

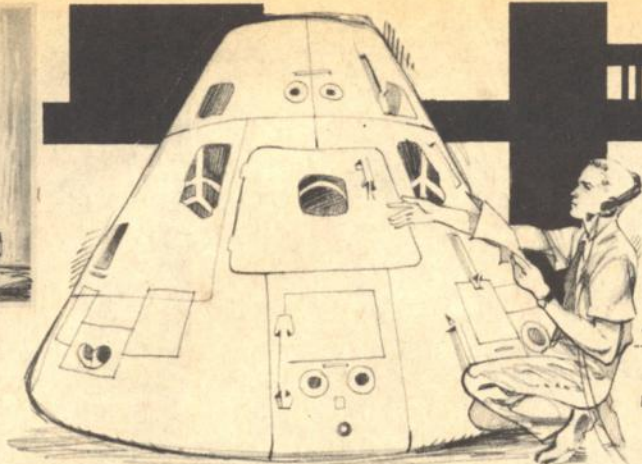
THE EXPERIMENTS MARK WAS CONDUCTING WERE BOTHERING SHEILA-BUT WHAT WAS THERE TO SAY OR DO ABOUT THEM? IF SHE INTERFERED ANY FURTHER SHE MIGHT LOSE MARK'S LOVE.

BUT WHAT OF THOSE EXPERIMENTS? WHAT OF THOSE INNOCENT ANIMALS HE SENT INTO SPACE...NEVER TO RETURN? HOW DID MARK FEEL ABOUT THEM? HOW COULD AN OTHER-WISE SENSITIVE YOUNG MAN LIKE HIM STRAP AN ANIMAL

INTO A SMALL SPACE ROCKET AND SEND IT INTO INFINITE SPACE.... TO DIE A SLOW, LONELY DEATH....

DID YOU EVER WONDER WHAT GOES THROUGH THE MIND OF AN ANIMAL? ARE THEIR BRAINS JUST REFLEX MOTORS? OR IS THERE A HIDDEN POTENTIAL WAITING FOR THE RIGHT COMBINATION OF EVENTS TO DEVELOP THEM? PERHAPS THESE QUESTIONS ARE ANSWERED IN THE STORY OF....

SKIPPER'S RETURN!



GRC--
CHECK.
ELT SYSTEM--
CHECK.



COUNTDOWN
TEN-NINE-
EIGHT-SEVEN
SIX-FIVE-
FOUR-THREE
TWO-ONE
LIFTOFF,
WE HAVE
LIFTOFF!!

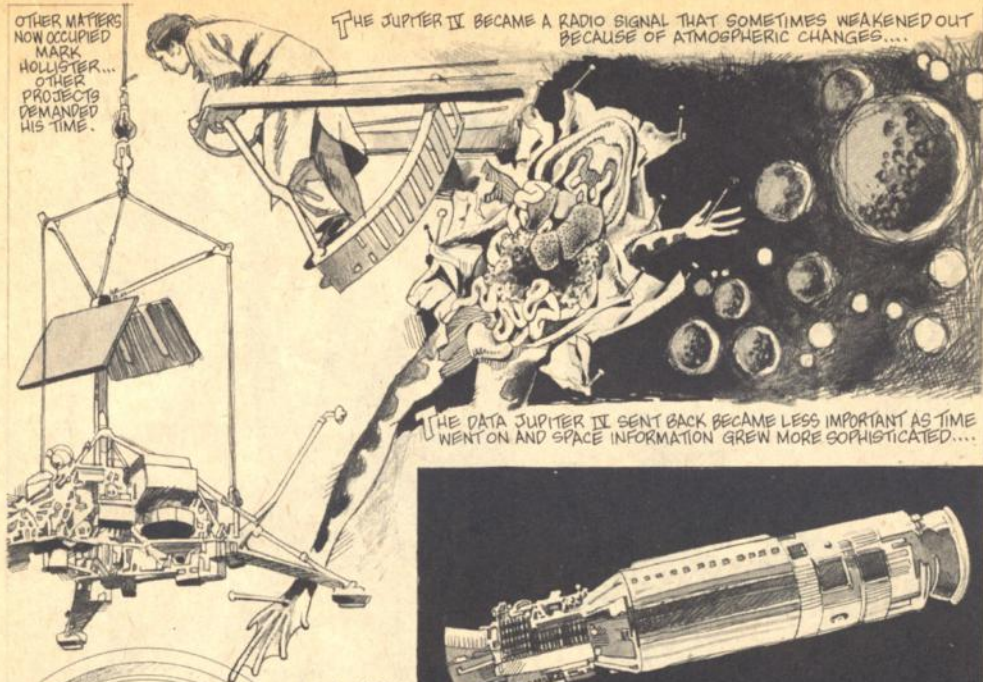


AS THE GRACEFUL
ROCKET LIFTED,
TAKING SKIPPER ON
HIS LONG JOURNEY,
MARK TURNED TO
SEE SHEILA WALK
AWAY.
A WAY FROM THE
EXPERIMENTS -
THE ANIMALS - THEIR
EYES GLAZED,
UNCOMPREHENDING.
AWAY FROM MARK -
THE MAN SHE
THOUGHT SHE KNEW...

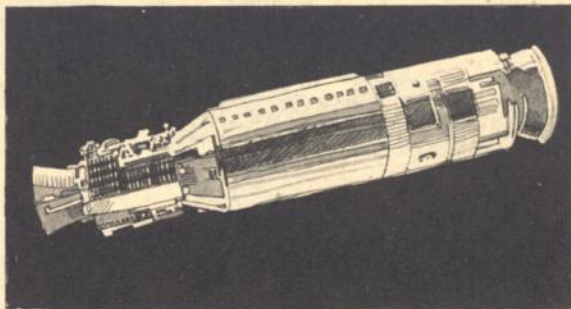


OTHER MATTERS
NOW OCCUPIED
MARK
HOLLISTER...
OTHER
PROJECTS
DEMANDED
HIS TIME.

THE JUPITER II BECAME A RADIO SIGNAL THAT SOMETIMES WEAKENED OUT
BECAUSE OF ATMOSPHERIC CHANGES....



THE DATA JUPITER II SENT BACK BECAME LESS IMPORTANT AS TIME
WENT ON AND SPACE INFORMATION GREW MORE SOPHISTICATED....



BUT WHAT
OF SKIPPER?
WHAT OF THE
ODYSSEY OF
THIS BEAST
WHOSE TINY

BRAIN COULD NOT
COMPREHEND THE
SMALLEST FRACTION
OF WHAT
WAS HAPPENING
TO HIM....



SKIPPER'S ROCKET
ARCED ITS WAY
GRACEFULLY
TOWARDS
GANYMEDE, A
SATELLITE IN
THE SYSTEM
OF JUPITER.

GRAVITATIONAL
ENERGY, IN
DENSE WAVES,
ENGULF THE
JUPITER II.

INSIDE, THE ALMOST MORIBUND BODY OF SKIPPER TWITCHES
AS THE ROCKET, WHICH BY NOW SHOULD BE HIS COFFIN,
TURNS AWAY FROM GANYMEDE AND TRACES ITS
COURSE - BACK TO EARTH!



DOCTOR
HOLLISTER!
I'M GETTING
A STRONGER
READING
FROM JUPITER
II! IT'S AS
IF - IT WERE
RETURNING!!

THE JUPITER IV CAN'T RETURN! IT WAS PROGRAMMED TO RELAY INFORMATION TO US ABOUT ATMOSPHERIC CONDITIONS ON JUPITER AND THE EFFECTS ON MAN-

-BUT NOT TO RETURN! IT SIMPLY CAN'T!

IMPOSSIBLE DEVELOPMENT!! TO HAVE DATA COMING FROM A SHIP THAT SHOULD'VE "DIED" OUT IN SPACE- CODED DATA FROM AN APE!

SIR- I TELL YOU IT IS RETURNING!! ITS SIGNALS ARE UNMISTAKEABLE THEY-SEEM

TO BE IN SOME KIND OF CODE!!

WEEKS PASSED, WITH DOCTOR HOLLISTER POKING OVER PAGES OF CODED DATA COMING FROM THE JUPITER IV

IT'S LANDED! THE JUPITER IV HAS LANDED SOMEWHERE ON THIS BASE! ITS SIGNALS ARE DEAFENING!!

IT'S HERE!

PEEONPEEONNYKKEOONNGREEO

SKIPPER

1/2 01 1/6 2/1 2 05 06 3 2/6 3 2/4
3/4 3/2 1/1 2/1 2/5 05 3/2 01 2/5 2/6 01 1/4
05 2 3/2 1/1 2/1 2/5
05 1/5 1/2 3/1
05 2/5 3/2
05 2/4
05 2 04
05 04 3/2 1/1 2/1 2/2
05 1/2 2 2/5 2/6 1/2 2 01
2/6 2/5 3/2.....05 2/4
05 04
05 2 1/2 3 2/4 2/5 3 06
05 04 2/1 2 1 1/2 2/5 2/4
05 2/4 1/2 2 1 3/2 1/2 2/5
05 01 1/5 1/1 2/1 3/2 1/2 1/5
05 2 04 1 1/2 3/2 1/2 1/5
05 2/6 3 2/4 2 04 2/4 1/1
05 2/4 2/6 2/1 1/6 01 1/4
05 01 02
05 1 1/1 2 2 1/2 2 1
01 1/4 1/2 2 1 06 1/2 2/4
05 2 04
02 1 02 3/4 1/6
2/5 2/6 01 2

THE CODE
I COULDN'T
BREAK
IT—THERE
MUST BE A
CLUE IN IT
AS TO THIS
PHENOMENON....

SUDDENLY—THE MEANING OF THE CODE MATERIALISED
FOR HOLLISTER. AS IF BY TELEPATHY, ITS MEANING
WAS QUITE CLEAR....

GOOD GOD!
I CAN'T
BELIEVE IT!

NOW THERE ARE FOOTSTEPS ON THE STAIRS...
LURCHING, INHUMAN STEPS COMING CLOSER—



CONGRATULATIONS,
DR HOLLISTER....
..ON YOUR ABILITY...
TO...DECODE MY
MESSAGE TO YOU!

NO! YOU CAN'T
BE HERE! YOU
CAN'T TALK!
YOU COULDN'T
HAVE SENT
THAT MESSAGE!
NONE OF THIS
CAN BE HAPPENING!!

—AND NOW, DOCTOR—YOU
SHALL KNOW THE LONELINESS
AND PRIVATION OF SPACE
AND IF YOU SURVIVE THE
TRIP TO JUPITER
PERHAPS ITS
ATMOSPHERE WILL
ENLARGE YOUR
BRAIN—PERHAPS
IT WILL GIVE
YOU MORE
COMPASSION
FOR YOUR
FELLOW
CREATURES
IF YOU
SURVIVE!!



-6-5-4-3-
2-1...WE
HAVE
LIFTOFF!
WE HAVE
LIFTOFF...



BET OL' DOC
HOLLISTER GOT A
LIFT OUT OF THAT
ONE! WELL, YOU
REALLY SHOULDN'T
MONKEY AROUND
WITH...MONKEYS!
THEY HAVE A HABIT
OF IMITATING...YOU
KNOW—MONKEY
SEE, MONKEY DO?
HEE HEEHEEE...

SIMMER DOWN, GOULISH GOURMETS WHILE I STIR UP A YARN THAT'S SURE TO WHET YOUR APPETITE! IT'S A LITTLE TIDBIT ABOUT A WITCH WITH A POT BELLY, AND A REAL KETTLE FULL OF LAUGHS THAT NEEDS ONLY...

THE FINAL INGREDIENT!



EYEBALL OF SALAMANDER!
GALL BLADDER OF DOG!
PINCH OF LIZARD JUICE...
MAKES A PRINCE OF A FROG!

AUNT LUCINDA! ARE YOU STILL FOOLING AROUND WITH WITCHCRAFT?!



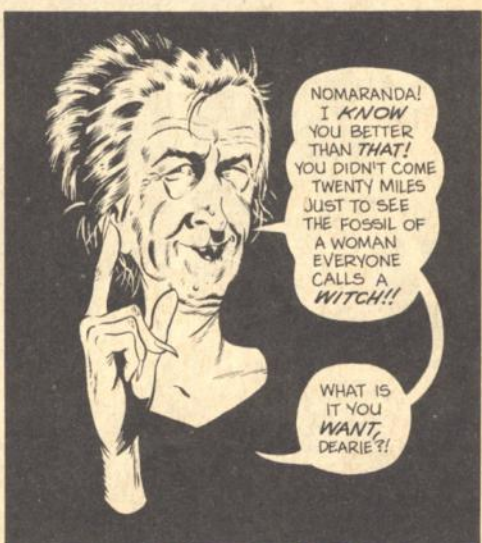
NOMARANDA, DARLING! WHAT BRINGS YOU TO SEE YOUR LONELY OLD AUNTIE?

OH, I JUST DROPPED BY TO SEE HOW YOU WERE!



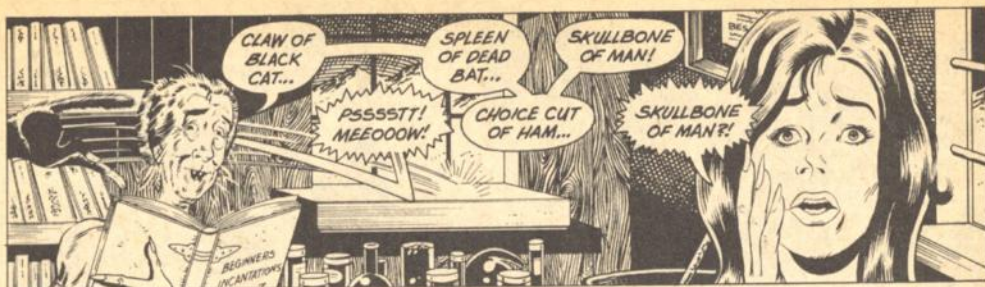
NOMARANDA! I *KNOW* YOU BETTER THAN *THAT*! YOU DIDN'T COME TWENTY MILES JUST TO SEE THE FOSSIL OF A WOMAN EVERYONE CALLS A *WITCH*!!

WHAT IS IT YOU *WANT*, DEARIE?!



ART AND STORY BY BILL DUBAY







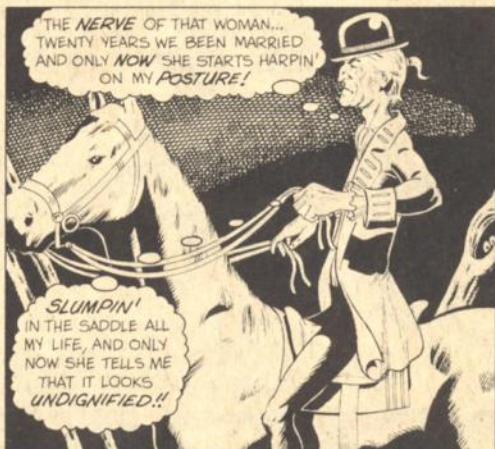
FEW PEOPLE TRAVEL ALONG THIS PATH... SO I OUGHT TO HAVE ENOUGH TIME TO FINISH RIGGING MY LITTLE **TRAP!**



THIS IS JUST HIGH ENOUGH TO **STRIKE** AN AVERAGE SIZED MAN ON HORSEBACK...
...AND TAKE HIS HEAD CLEAN OFF AS SOON AS THE TRIP-STRING IS **SPRUNG!**



OH, WHAT **TIMING!** HERE COMES A RIDER NOW! I'LL JUST WAIT IN HIDING AND SCOOP UP HIS HEAD AS SOON AS IT **DROPS!**



THE **NERVE** OF THAT WOMAN... TWENTY YEARS WE BEEN MARRIED AND ONLY **NOW** SHE STARTS HARPIN' ON MY **POSTURE!**

'SLUMPIN' IN THE SADDLE ALL MY LIFE, AND ONLY NOW SHE TELLS ME THAT IT LOOKS **UNDIGNIFIED!!**



WELL, I DON'T CARE **HOW** IT LOOKS! TOO OLD TO CHANGE MY WAYS NOW! I'LL **SLUMP** IF I DARN WELL...



...PLEASE!??



WHOOEEEEEE!!! IF I'D BEEN SITTIN' UP STRAIGHT, I'DA HAD A **SORE THROAT** TO BEAT ALL!!



DAMN! NO TELLING *HOW* LONG I'LL HAVE TO WAIT FOR ANOTHER RIDER NOW! AT LEAST I WON'T HAVE TO RE-SET MY TRAP! THAT AXE SWINGS EITHER WAY!



I'M GOIN' STRAIGHT HOME AND *KILL* THAT WOMAN... THEN I'M GONNA *SLUMP* FOR THE REST OF MY LIFE! IT'LL SURE BE A LOT LONGER!



AH! HERE COMES ANOTHER ONE! I MUST SAY, I'VE SURE WAITED LONG ENOUGH!!



SWISH!

*SPUNK!




I HAVE IT! A HEAD IS *MINE* AT LAST! NOW AUNTIE'S SPELL WILL BE COMPLETE...



...AND ROMANATO WILL BE MINE... FOREVER!!







THE LARGER MOON OF IRITH WAS
SETTING AS THE MORNING SUN CLIMBED
INTO THE SKY. THE FOREST TRILLED,
CHIRPED AND HUMMED TO ANNOUNCE
THE DAWN, BUT THE OVERTURE THIS
MORNING WAS A...

PRELUDE TO ARMAGEDDON

HE STOOD TRANFIXED,
THE LOVELUST UPON HIM,
FOR HE HAD NEVER IN HIS
LIFE SEEN ANYTHING SO
BEAUTIFUL...



THEN...



THEY COULD NOT UNDERSTAND
EACH OTHER, BUT TO AQUINAS
HER VOICE WAS MUSIC...



SENIOR EQUINUS,
MESSENGER OF THE
GODS, PAUSED ON HIS
ERRAND... ATTRACTED
BY A CLEAR, SILVERY
VOICE, HE FOLLOWED
THE SOUND TO A
CRYSTAL POOL WHERE
HE SAW HER, A PALE
FLAME IN THE
SHADOWS...

THEN, A
RUSTLE
OF
MIGHTY
WINGS...

THE WIND SHIFTED
AND THE CLOUDS
PARTED, TO REVEAL...

WINGED
DEMON!

I SHOULD
HAVE KNOWN...

...SHE IS ONE OF
THE **DRAGON
RIDERS!**

AS SHE STRUCK THE GROUND,
EQUINUS COULD HEAR THE
SOUND OF BONES BREAKING...

WITHOUT BREAKING HIS STRIDE,
HE SCOOPED HER UP IN HIS ARMS..

THE RUINS!...
MY ONLY
CHANCE!

SKREEE!

SKREEE!

THEY ARE IN
RANGE... I FEAR
I WILL NOT
MAKE IT...

BUT JUST IN TIME, HE PLUNGED INTO THE COMFORTING SHADOWS OF THE RUINED CITY...



...THE RUINED CAPITAL OF THE DEAD CIVILIZATION OF ANCIENT IRITH...

O GREAT SATORIS... I, SONTOR 'CQUINUS, YOUR L3EDIENT SERVANT, CALL UPON YOU...



HIS HEARTFELT PLEA WAS HEARD ON HIGH...

SPEAK, FAITHFUL SONTOR! MY FOLLOWERS NEED NEVER FEAR THAT THEIR PLEAS ARE IN VAIN...



LORD OF LIFE AND LOVE, I ASK NOTHING FOR MYSELF, BUT...



...FOR THIS INNOCENT GIRL, WHO LIES SO NEAR DEATH... I ASK THAT YOU GIVE HER THE GIFT THAT ONLY YOU CAN BESTOW... LIFE!



AH, BACHELOR! YOU HAVE FOUND A MATE AT LAST... THIS PLEASES ME!



OF COURSE, I WILL GRANT YOUR REQUEST...

...AND THE BREATH OF LIFE WAS GIVEN THE **DRAGON RIDER**...



IT WAS NOT I WHO GAVE YOU BACK YOUR LIFE, LITTLE ONE... BUT YOU ARE INCAPABLE OF UNDERSTANDING THAT...

VERY WELL, I WILL ACCEPT YOUR GRATITUDE.





BEFORE MIDDAY, THEY NEARED SENTOR'S HOMELAND...

THE LUST FOR REVENGE UPON HIM, EQUINUS THUNDERED INTO THE OGRES WITH FLASHING SWORD AND CRUSHING HOOVES...

THE SHORTEST WAY TO CIRIUS GORGOROTH IS **STRAIGHT THROUGH THEM!**

DO NOT BE AFRAID, MELODY... THESE PUNY CREATURES CAN DO NOTHING AGAINST **SENTOR EQUINUS!**

IT WAS INCREDIBLE THAT THIS WOULD BE A WORLD AT WAR...THE SUN WAS WARM UPON THEM AS THEY MADE A LUNCH OF WILD FRUITS AND BERRIES...

I WOULD LIVE IN PARADISE ALL OF MY LIFE...

...BUT I HAVE NEVER BEEN HAPPY UNTIL NOW!



THEN, AS THEY PROCEEDED...

WHO DARES KILL THE MINIONS OF MINOS TAURUS?

I, **SENTOR EQUINUS!**

A BELLOW OF RAGE ECHOED IN HIS HELMET AS MINOS TAURUS LUNGED FORWARD...

THEN DIE, FOOL!

MANY HAVE TRIED, FRIEND!

THE FIGHT WAS LONG AND TERRIBLE...A WELL-AIMED BLOW LANDED ON THE HELMET OF MINOS TAURUS...

THE WAR SPREAD...DRAGON RIDERS FLUSHED AN ARMY OF OGRES FROM THE FOREST...

...OUT INTO THE OPEN PLAIN, WHERE THEY WERE NO MATCH FOR THE CHARGE OF A CAVALRY COMPOSED OF HIGHLY TRAINED, DISCIPLINED CENTAUR LANCERS...



AGE OLD HATREDS DROVE BOTH SIDES TO DEEDS OF INCREDIBLE BRAVERY AND CRUELTY. NO WOUNDED SURVIVORS CRAWLED AWAY FROM THIS ENCOUNTER...FOR EVERY COMBAT WAS FOUGHT TO THE DEATH ...

SENTOR EQUINUS FOUGHT LIKE A MADMAN, BUT THE TERRIBLE CHAIN MACE OF MINOS TAURUS STRUCK HIM AGAIN AND AGAIN ...



BLOOD GUSHED FROM HIS LACERATED CHEST, AND FROM HIS HEAD, BLINDING HIM...HE FELT HIS STRENGTH POURING OUT WITH IT...

A FINAL, CRUSHING BLOW, AND HE WAS DOWN ...



THE AERIAL
BATTLE HAD
GONE WELL
FOR THE
FORCES OF
SATORIS,
AND DRAGON
RIDERS WERE
HUNTING
DOWN THE
REMAINING
DEMONS WITH
FIRE BOLTS...

WE HAVE
LOST,
MY LORD...

DO NOT DESPAIR
YET! THERE IS ONE
FINAL WEAPON...
I HESITATED TO
USE IT, BUT NOW
WE **MUST!**
LEAVE ME!
I SHALL CALL
UPON BLUD
TO COME TO
OUR AID...

KARION CHANTED AN
ANCIENT INVOCATION...

...AND IN ANSWER, LOATHSOME SHAPES
ROSE UP FROM THE GROUND...

...AN INVOCATION COM-
POSED OF CURSES
AND BLASPHEMES...



WHY DO
YOU
PAUSE?
KILL ME
AND BE
DONE!

THERE IS NO NEED,
YOU ARE ALREADY
DEAD... WE ARE
ALL DEAD!

AN ARMY OF
MINDLESS,
DEAD BODIES,
FULL OF HATE
FOR ALL
LIVING THINGS,
AND CHARGED
WITH
PSEUDO-LIFE
RAGED ACROSS
THE FACE OF
IRITH...



YOU ARE
WITH US,
MINOS
TAURUS?



YES...
I DID
NOT
BELIEVE
EVEN
KARION
WOULD
DO...
THIS!




MELODY!




I KNOW,
LITTLE ONE..
I LOVE YOU
TOO! NOW JUST
CLOSE YOUR
EYES! I WILL
BE WITH YOU
SOON...




...AND
NOW...



SENATOR EQUINUS!
YOU ARE **WASTING**
TIME... THE DEAD
OUTNUMBER THE
LIVING! WE ARE
DEFEATED! THIS
IS NOT YOUR FUNCTION...
IT IS NOT ACCOMPLISH-
ING THE MISSION I
SENT YOU ON!

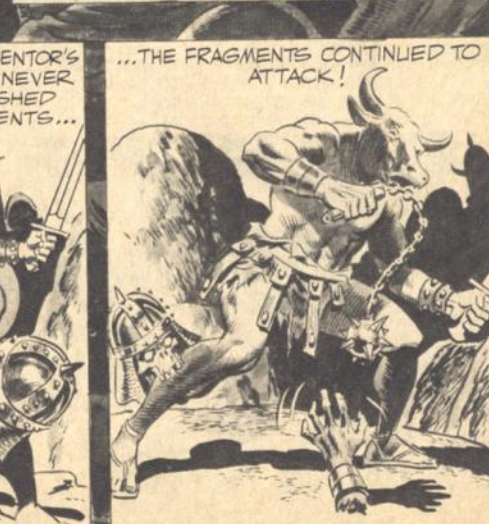


**NOW GO! GO TO
CIRIUS GORGOROTH!
FIND THE MICROCOSM
AND DO WHAT
MUST BE DONE!
AND HURRY!!**



WITH THE AWFUL
STRENGTH OF
MADNESS, THE
TWO BECOME A
JUGGERNAUT,
CRUSHING FETID,
CORRUPT
BODIES IN A
WIDE PATH OF
DESTRUCTION...

**HURRY! THERE
IS NOT MUCH TIME
LEFT...**



THE MIGHTY TAURIUS COVERED SENATOR'S
DEPARTURE, FIGHTING AS HE HAD NEVER
FOUGHT... BUT, THOUGH HE SMASHED
AND CUT THE DEAD INTO FRAGMENTS...

...THE FRAGMENTS CONTINUED TO
ATTACK!

...AND AT LAST, MINOS TAURUS, THE ONLY SHIELD BETWEEN EQUINUS AND THE HORDE OF THE LIVING DEAD, RECEIVED A MORTAL THRUST...



...AND STILL HE REFUSED TO FALL, BUT CONTINUED TO REND AND CUT AND SMASH EVERYTHING THAT CAME WITHIN REACH...

BUT BY THEN THE CENTAUR, GUIDED BY SATORIS, WAS IN THE HEART OF CIRIUS GORGOROTH... AND THEN HE SAW IT...

I AM HERE, O' LORD...
WHAT MUST I DO?
CAN YOU TELL ME
NOW?

YES, GOOD SATOR...
YOU ARE MY ONLY HOPE
NOW... IT IS BETTER THAT
EVERYONE DIE THAN A
WORLD DOMINATED
BY BLUD AND
THE LIVING DEAD...

NOW GO...
FIND THE
GLOBE
WITH TWO
LARGE
SATELLITES...

THE MICROCOSM!

AND
NOW..?

**BREAK
THE
MOON!**



FOR A MOMENT, HE DID NOT KNOW WHETHER THIS WAS REALLY A TINY FACSIMILE OR WHETHER HE WAS SUDDENLY AS LARGE AS THE ENTIRE UNIVERSE... HE REACHED OUT A HAND, SEIZED THE TINY MOON, CRUSHED IT...



... AND DIED.



...AND EARTH'S
NEAREST MOON
EXPLODED!

EARTHQUAKES
TORE THE
CONTINENT
IN HALF...
VOLCANOES
ERUPTED,
SPEWING
LAVA OVER
THE BATTLE-
FIELD...

MINOS TAURUS
SUFFERED
WOUND UPON
WOUND...
AND STILL
HE FOUGHT...

MINOS! WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
YOU FIGHT YOUR OWN...

KARION!

THEN MIGHTY
MINOS TAURUS
FELL...

A MOUNTAINOUS TIDAL WAVE
TOWERED OVER THE SHUDDER-
ING, TORTURED CONTINENT...



...AND CRASHED DOWN UPON IRITH, WHERE ARMIES CONTINUED TO FIGHT EVEN AS THE LAND UNDER THEIR FEET SANK INTO THE SEA...

AT LAST IT WAS OVER...
IRITH WAS GONE,
LEAVING ONLY
LEGENDS TO
MARK ITS
EXISTENCE...

BUT THERE WAS OTHER LAND
OTHER CONTINENTS, WHERE
OGRES SURVIVED...



...AND DEVELOPED INTO
THE DOMINANT SPECIES...

THE FEW DRAGONS LEFT
EVENTUALLY DIED OUT,
AND WERE REPLACED
BY NEW LIFE FORMS...



...AND THAT IS THE
STORY I DECIPHERED
FROM THESE ANCIENT
RUNES CARVED IN
STONE IN THIS CAVE,
MILES BELOW THE
SURFACE. THIS
SEEMS TO BE
THE RESTING PLACE
OF SATORIS, AND
HIS MESSAGE
GOES ON
TO SAY:

"MY PARADISE ENDED
IN CHAOS, AND I
WASHED THE CHAOS
AWAY. I AM SURE
INTELLIGENT LIFE
WILL EVOLVE AGAIN...
THAT IS THE WAY OF
THE COSMIC LIFE
FORCE..."

"...I PRAY THAT WHATEVER
FORM IT TAKES, IT WILL
FIND A WAY TO LIVE IN
PEACE AND HARMONY,
SO THAT I MAY SLEEP
FOREVER. BUT IF I AM
NEEDED AGAIN, I WILL
COME, TO CLEANSER THE
EARTH WITH FIRE AND
FLOOD!"

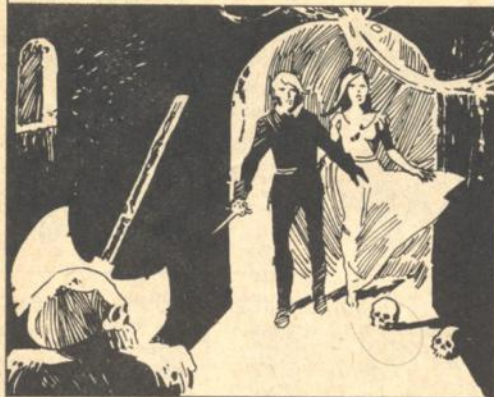
HEH! HEH!
WELL, I
GUESS HE
CAN SLEEP...
WE WON'T
NEED HIM
AGAIN, AS WE
ARE HAPPY,
CIVILIZED
AND PEACEFUL...

...AREN'T
WE?



PROLOGUE:

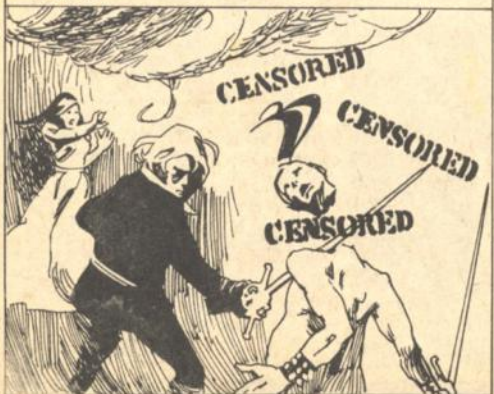
THE STENCH OF DEATH AND HORROR REACHED SIR REGINALD O'NEIL'S NOSTRILS AS HE MADE HIS WAY CAUTIOUSLY DOWN THE LONG, DARK HALLWAY...



SHE GREW SILENT, KNOWING IT WAS USELESS TO ARGUE. HE KISSED HER, REALIZING THAT THIS MIGHT WELL BE THEIR LAST KISS...



WITH ONE QUICK FLICK OF HIS ENCHANTED RAPIER, REGINALD FINISHED WITH THIS OPPONENT, BUT KNEW THE OTHERS WOULDN'T BE THIS EASY...



HE TURNED THEN TO HIS LOVELY COMPANION...

YOU MUST STAY HERE! I'LL GO THE REST OF THE WAY ALONE!

BUT, REGINALD, I'VE AS MUCH RIGHT AS...



SUDDENLY...



GOOD GOD! WHAT HAS HE DONE TO MY STORY!!! ALL MY BEAUTIFUL ARTWORK—RUINED!

AND WHERE'D HE GET THIS CENSORED STAMP? HE'S NEVER USED THAT BEFORE!

HE'S REALLY GOTTEN OUT OF HAND THIS TIME!



ART BY GARY KAUFMAN/STORY BY STEVE SKEATES

TIME TO TUNE IN ON SOME TERROR, ALL YOU PERCEIVERS
OF THE PULSATING! BUT TO COMPLETELY GROOVE ON THE
VIBRATIONS OF **THIS** TALE, YOU'LL NEED...

EXTRA CENSORY PERCEPTION

LISTEN, MR. STAMP, I KNOW
YOU HAVE **COMPLETE AUTHORITY**
OVER EVERYTHING WE PUBLISH,
BUT THIS IS **COMPLETELY**
RIDICULOUS!

WHY IN HEAVEN'S NAME
DID YOU CENSOR
THIS PANEL HERE?

THAT PANEL?
ARE YOU **KIDDING?**
THE HERO WAS CUTTING THE
OTHER MAN'S **HEAD** OFF!
WE CAN'T HAVE A
SCENE LIKE **THAT!**

MR. STAMP

BUT IT WAS A **CLEAN**
CUT. THERE WASN'T ANY
BLOOD SPURTING OUT
OR ANYTHING!

AND YOU CAN'T
USE THE WORD
"RAPIER" IN A
COMIC STORY!
THAT'S **OBSCENE!**

KLADE
KOMIX CODY
AUTHORITY

CENSORED

ALL RIGHT, THEN—WHAT'S
WRONG WITH **THIS** PANEL?

THEIR **BODIES**
ARE TOUCHING
WHILE THEY
KISS!

SO WHAT?...

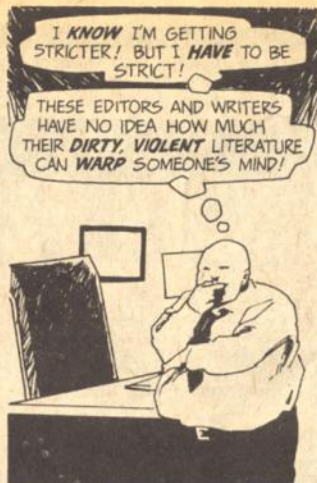
...YOU'VE NEVER CENSORED
ANYTHING LIKE THAT **BEFORE!**

SO—
I CHANGED THE **RULES!**

YOU **CAN'T** DO THAT!

OH **YES** I CAN!
YOU SAID IT **YOURSELF**—I HAVE
COMPLETE **AUTHORITY!** AND I'LL
CENSOR THINGS THE WAY
I SEE FIT!

NOW, **GET OUT** OF MY OFFICE!





FOR SOME TIME THEY FIGHT FOR THE KNIFE...THEN...



A PIERCING SCREAM INTERRUPTS HIS THOUGHTS...

AND, AS HE WHIRLS ABOUT...



HE BLINDS HIS EYES, AND WITH MORAL FERVOR, REACHES OUT TOWARD THE WOMAN. PERHAPS HE FEELS HE HOLDS HIS "CENSORED" STAMP. BUT INSTEAD, HE STILL HOLDS THE KNIFE...



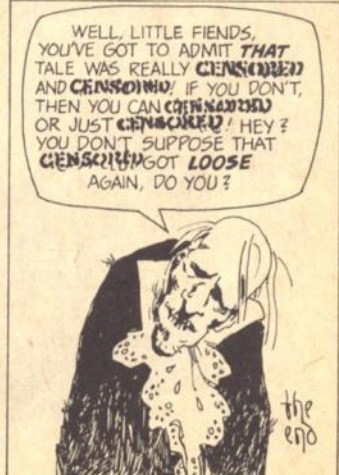
THEN...



THE POLICE RESPOND TO A HURRIED CALL...



AND, WHEN THEY REACH THE SCENE...





A TANGIBLE HATRED



IT IS THE 22ND OF FEBRUARY. THE MORNING TABLOIDS SCREAM THEIR LURID LINES TO A PUBLIC THAT HAS BECOME INNURED TO SADISTIC VIOLENCE. IT SEEMS TO OCCUR AS REGULARLY AS THE WAY THEY DRINK THEIR MORNING COFFEE. BUT DETECTIVE 2ND GRADE DAVID TURNER HAS NOT YET BECOME INNURED TO THE VIOLENCE. HE HAS TOO RECENTLY VISITED THE SIGHTS OF THE SLAYINGS; HE HAS TOO RECENTLY TALKED WITH THE PEOPLE WHO REMAIN BEHIND TO MOURN THE DEAD ONES; HE HAS TOO RECENTLY FELT THE HATRED EMANATING FROM ALL THE EYES THAT WATCH HIM PASS BY. HE REMEMBERS ALL OF THIS AS HE ENTERS COMMISSIONER DAMON'S OFFICE.



KNOCK IT OFF, WILLIS.
IT'S BEEN A LONG
NIGHT.

FIVE NIGHTS
WE'VE BEEN LETTIN'
THIS SADISTIC
FIEND RUN LOOSE
WHEN'RE YOU GONNA
SEW IT UP, TURNER?



YOU SOUND A LOT
LIKE JOHN Q. PUBLIC,
WILLIS. I HOPE THAT'S
THE **ONLY** COMMON
TRAIT YOU'VE GOT
WITH THEM.

HEY, WILLIS,
YOU WANTA
CHECK THIS
OUT?



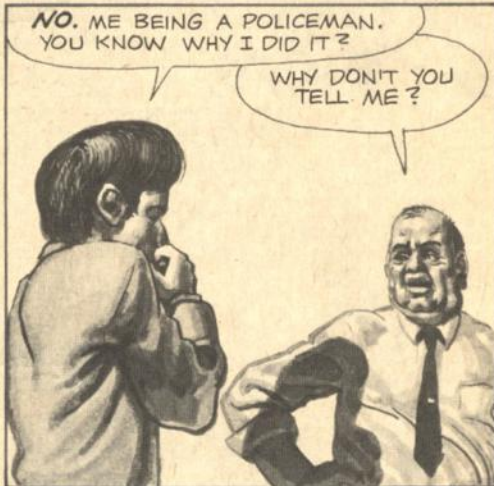
YOU WANT TO KNOW WHAT I THINK,
COMMISSIONER? I THINK THIS
IS ALL A FARCE!

WHAT DO YOU
MEAN? THE
MURDERS!



NO. ME BEING A POLICEMAN.
YOU KNOW WHY I DID IT?

WHY DON'T YOU
TELL ME?



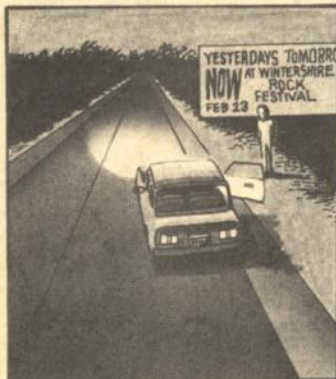
IT WASN'T OUT OF A SENSE OF
DUTY; BUT BECAUSE I THOUGHT I
COULD REACH OUT AND TOUCH THEM
BECAUSE **I** THOUGHT THERE SHOULD
BE SOMEBODY WHO KNEW WHERE
IT WAS AT... WHO HAD BEEN THERE
AND KNEW HOW ROUGH A TRIP
IT COULD BE!!



WILLIS IS RIGHT! I AM A BLEEDING
HEART! AND WHAT HAPPENS? I **CAN'T**
DO ANY OF THAT NOW BECAUSE THEY
LOOK AT ME AND I'M NO LONGER
DAVID TURNER! I'M JUST
ANOTHER **PIG** IN A BLUE
UNIFORM! SEE YOU, SIR!!



ROGER AND MARILYN STURGES SEE THE FIGURE IN THE DARK. THEY HAVE BEEN ARGUING WITH EACH OTHER. ROGER STURGES STOPS THE CAR TO PICK UP THE HITCH-HIKER. PERHAPS THE STRANGER'S PRESENCE WILL PROVIDE A BRIEF RESPIRE FROM THE CONSTANT ANTAGONISM THAT HAS BECOME ROUTINE BETWEEN THEM.



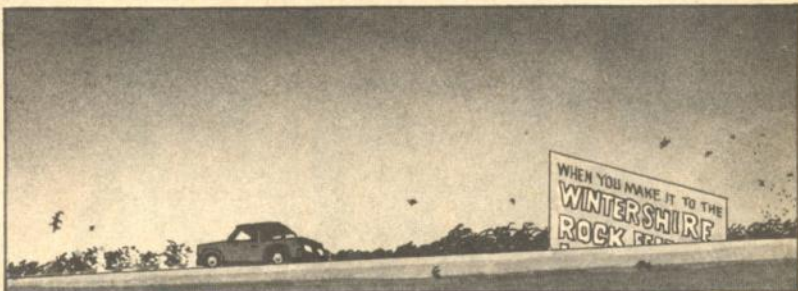
YET IMMEDIATELY ROGER FEELS AN AURA ABOUT THE FIGURE, ALMOST AS IF THE HITCH-HIKER IS ABSORBING THE VERY ESSENCE WITHIN THE CAR. ROGER CAN STILL SEE THE DESPAIR IN MARILYN'S EYES, BUT AT LEAST, AS THE MAN ENTERS, HE CANNOT HEAR THE HATRED IN HER VOICE OR FOR THAT MATTER, THE HATRED IN HIS OWN VOICE!



THERE IS A PASSAGE OF TIME IN WHICH ROGER FEELS THAT HE AND MARILYN EXIST ONLY FOR THE STRANGER. AND THAT THE RIDE IS NO LONGER FOR THEM BUT FOR THEIR PASSENGER.



IT IS MORE THAN A LOSS OF WILL, ROGER KNOWS AS HE FINALLY GLIDES THE CAR TO A STOP. HE HAS NO IDEA HOW MUCH TIME HAS PASSED. IT DOES NOT SEEM TO MATTER.



A GRADUAL AWARENESS HAS COME TO HIM. HE VIEWS AS MARILYN'S DEATH AS IF THROUGH A FILTER.



THE KILLER'S FACE TURNS TO HIM. THERE ARE ANIMALISTIC SOUNDS AS THE GROTESQUE FORM MOVES PAST MARILYN TOWARD HIM. IN THAT LAST MOMENT OF SLOW MOTION MOVEMENT, ROGER STURGES REALIZES THAT THE CONSTANT ANTAGONISM HAS FINALLY ENDED PERMANENTLY.

IT IS THE 23RD OF FEBRUARY. MORNING LIGHT FILTERS THROUGH THE BLINDS. DAVID TURNER STARES SIGHTLESSLY AT THE LIGHT, SEEING PAST THE MUTILATED BODIES OR ROGER AND MARILYN STURGES, TRYING TO GLIMPSE SOMETHING WHICH CONTINUALLY ELUDES HIM!



HOW MANY ACTS OF VICIOUS VIOLENCE CAN YOU THINK OF IN RECENT MONTHS, SIR. I MEAN YOU CAN COUNT THEM OFF THE TOP OF YOUR HEAD! KENT STATE! BEVERLY HILLS! SAN FERNANDO! OUR DEAR OWN NEW YORK HAS **MORE** THAN IT'S OWN!



HATRED!!! A TANGIBLE HATRED!

SIR!!! THIS SILENT HITCH-HIKER ON HIS WAY TO THE NEXT SITE OF VIOLENCE! MAYBE HE'S CREATED BY A COALITION OF VIOLENT THOUGHT WAVES! I MEAN ALL OF THIS PSYCHIC FORCE HAS TO GO SOMEWHERE!! MAYBE IT RESULTS IN A MANIFESTATION OF **EVIL** THAT SEEKS IT'S OWN ELEMENT!!!



THAT'S ABSURD!

OF COURSE IT IS! PSYCHIC PHENOMENA! IT'S ABSURD! JUST A PET THEORY, THAT'S ALL, SIR!



WELL FORGET IT, YOU'D BETTER JOIN WILLIS. WHILE YOU'VE BEEN CONJURING UP PHANTOM MONSTERS, WILLIS HAS FOUND AN OLD WINO WHO SAW OUR HITCH-HIKER. GET DOWN THERE.



THE HOUSE IS LITTLE MORE THAN A WOOD FRAME. TURNER HAS SEEN STRUCTURES LIKE IT BEFORE, AND HE HAS SEEN THEIR INHABITANTS, BROKEN PIECES OF HUMANITY WHO COMMIT SLOW SUICIDE WITH CHEAP WINE. HE HEARS THE VIOLENCE FROM INSIDE THE SHACK, AND IT TRIGGERS A VIOLENCE INSIDE HIM THAT IS ALMOST AS UNREASONING AS THE VIOLENCE HE LIVES AMIDST.



C'MON, YOU
FLEA BITTEN
DRUNK!



YOU'RE GONNA
PAY FOR THAT,
MISTER!

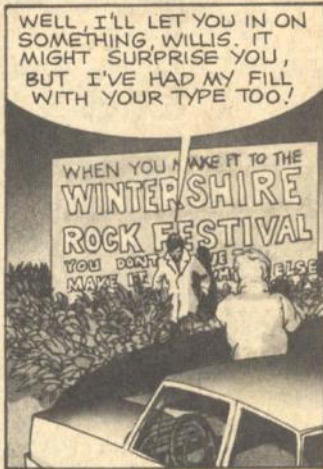


NOW YOU LISTEN TO ME, WILLIS!
YOU ARE GOING TO GET UP VERY SLOWLY,
REMEMBERING ALL THE TIME THAT
I DO NOT LIKE YOU, THAT I DO NOT LIKE
YOUR TYPE OF COP, OR THE KIND OF
NAME YOU GIVE ME AND ALL
THE OTHERS!



YOU ARE GOING TO REMEMBER THAT
AS YOU READ THIS MAN THE MIRANDA -
ESCOBEDO ACT OR ELSE I AM GOING
TO CONTINUE KNOCKING YOU DOWN
UNTIL YOU CAN NO LONGER
STAND UP!!!

THERE IS AN UNEASY TRUCE BETWEEN TURNER AND WILLIS AS THEY REVISIT THE SCENE OF THE MASSACRE. ONE LAST HOPE THAT MAYBE THERE IS SOMETHING THEY HAVE OVERLOOKED BEFORE.



THE ROCK FESTIVAL FOR THE BELIEVERS, IT IS A TABERNACLE OF SOUND. IT IS A SUPPOSED DISCARDING OF SOCIAL REPRESSIONS, FOR THE NONBELIEVERS, IT IS A COMBINATION OF ORGIASTIC RITES, PERMISSIVE BEHAVIOR AND RUINATION OF THE ART OF MUSIC. FOR DAVID TURNER, THE FESTIVAL PRESENTS ITSELF WITH ALL ITS FACETS. HE HAS SEEN BEYOND THE SHAM ON BOTH SIDES. HE HAS GLIMPSED THE HATRED THAT EACH SIDE HARBORS. AND NOW HE KNOWS THAT HIS TIME IS RUNNING OUT AND THAT SOMEHOW HE MUST CONVINCE THEM, CONVINCE ALL OF THEM.

COOL IT!! ALL OF YOU!
AND **CUT** THE SOUND!!

OH, MAN, HERE
COMES THE GESTAPO!



WHAT ARE
YOU TALKING
ABOUT?



YOU SEE, HE'S FEEDING ON YOUR
HATRED! AND IT'S A TIME OF
PLENTY!! IF YOU OR THOSE
POLICEMEN OUT THERE DIRECT
HATRED TOWARD EACH OTHER
THIS NIGHT, THE TABLOIDS
WILL HAVE MORALISTIC
FIELD DAY TOMORROW!



NO, MAN, THIS ISN'T THE
GESTAPO!! THIS IS MORE
THAN A CLASH OF ANTI-
ESTABLISHMENT VS.
ESTABLISHMENT! BECAUSE
YOU'RE BOTH HELPING TO
CREATE SOMETHING NEITHER
OF YOU CAN CONTROL!



THOSE MURDERS THAT HAVE
HAPPENED NEAR HERE! THE
HITCH-HIKER! HE'S ON
HIS WAY HERE! THIS IS
WHERE THE NEXT BIG
BLOOD BATH IS
SCHEDULED!



SO IT'S GONNA HAVE TO BE
LOVE, MAN! NOT JUST **LIP**
SERVICE TO THE WORD!!!
NOW YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE
TO **PRACTICE** IT TOWARDS
THE **ONES** YOU LIKE
THE **LEAST!!**



WILLIS IS ABOUT TO YANK TURNER FROM THE STAND WHEN THE FIRST SHOUT ANNOUNCES THE HITCH-HIKER'S PRESENCE. THEY ALL TURN TO STARE THROUGH THE DUSK. THE MUSIC IS SILENT FOR A MOMENT.



IS IT WORKING, TURNER? THE CREATURE SEEMS TO BE MOVING LESS CERTAINLY NOW. IS IT CONFUSED? DOES IT WONDER WHAT IS HAPPENING?

THE CREATURE ADVANCES. TURNER CLOSSES HIS EYES AND CONTINUES SPEAKING, HOPING HE IS GETTING THROUGH TO ALL THOSE SEPARATE LIVES AROUND HIM.

LISTEN TO ME, ALL OF YOU! YOU'VE GOTTA CLEAR YOUR MINDS!! JOIN HANDS, EVERYBODY!

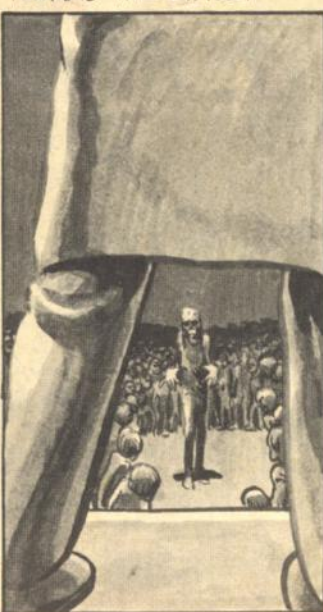


KEEP TALKING, TURNER, AS THE CREATURE NEARS THE FRINGE OF THE CROWD!! KEEP TALKING, TURNER, EVEN THOUGH YOU ARE ONLY A SUBSTITUTE MESSIAH FOR A CROWD THAT HAS LITTLE USE FOR A MESSIAH!

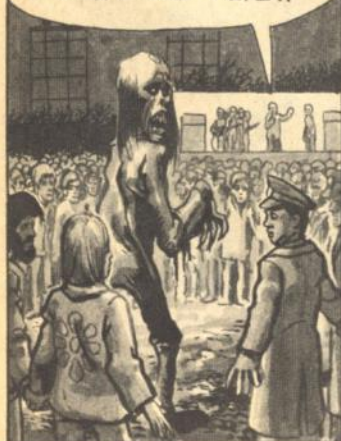
YOU GUYS START PLAYING! AND ALL OF YOU SING. AND FOR ONCE BELIEVE IN THE WORDS THAT YOU'RE SINGING!!



DOES IT SEEM LESS CONSISTENT NOW? BUT WAIT, NOW IT SEEMS TO HAVE REGAINED SOME OF ITS SUBSTANTIALITY AS IT MOVES RIGHT TOWARD THE STAGE.



IGNORE IT! YOU BROUGHT IT INTO EXISTENCE. YOU'VE NURTURED IT, AND YOU'VE INDIRECTLY BELIEVED IN IT! BUT IF YOU GIVE IT ANY NOURISHMENT NOW, IT'LL CONTINUE TO FLOURISH AND IT WON'T STOP HERE!!



IS IT YOU IT SEEKS? TURNER? HAVE YOU BEEN FEEDING IT, UNAWARE LIKE SO MANY OTHERS THAT YOU WERE DOING SO?

WILLIS OPENS FIRE AT THE CREATURE, BUT THE BULLETS HAVE NO EFFECT. TURNER SEES FLASHES OF AN OLD MAN CRUMPLED AT WILLIS'S FEET AS THE HITCH-HIKER ENDS WILLIS'S LIFE... TURNER NOTICES ONE THING WHEN THE ACT IS COMPLETED.



THAT ONE FACT BECOMES MORE EVIDENT AS THE HITCH-HIKER MOVES INTO THE CROWD AND FINDS FIRST ONE, AND THEN ANOTHER VICTIM. THIS APPARITION, THIS MANIFESTATION IS BECOMING **MORE INCONSISTANT**. YES, TURNER, IT IS LOCATING SOME RAMPANT HATRED AND AS SUCH IT IS DRAWN TO IT EXTINGUISHING THE VERY ESSENCE WHICH GIVES IT REALITY. THE MUSIC IS LOUD NOW, THE VOICES ARE RISING WITH IT. OLD VOICES AND NEW VOICES FOR ONCE SINGING IN ACCORD.



VERY FEW OF THEM ACTUALLY SEE IT HAPPEN, SEE IT TURN FIRST TO A WRAITH. THEN TO **NOTHINGNESS!** TURNER JOINS IN THE SONG, BUT HE HAS NOT DECEIVED HIMSELF AS HE LISTENS TO THE VOICES FILLING THE NIGHT AIR:

**THEY HAVE ONLY BURIED HIM
FOR A LITTLE WHILE...**

THE END

THE NATION'S NUMBER ONE BEAST SELLING PAPERBACK

A 160-PAGE
ILLUSTRATED
TREASURY
BY THE WORLD'S
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